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**Understanding Effective Leadership for  
Quality Early Childhood Programmes in Hong Kong**

**Dora Choi-wa Ho**

**A dissertation submitted to the University of Bristol in  
accordance  
with the requirements of  
the degree of Doctor of Education in the  
Faculty of Social Sciences, Graduate School of Education**

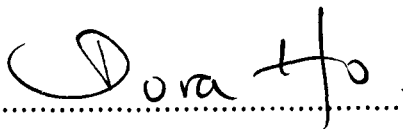
**October 2006**

## DECLARATION

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the Regulations of the University of Bristol. The work is original except where indicated by special reference in the text and no part of the dissertation has been submitted for any other degree.

Any views expressed in this dissertation are those of the author and in no way represent those of the University of Bristol.

The dissertation has not been presented to any other University for examination in the United Kingdom or overseas.

Signed .....  .....

Date .....  .....

## **Acknowledgements**

Tears of emotion welled up my eyes when I started writing this acknowledgement. It signifies not only the finishing point of my doctoral studies but a new landmark in my professional career.

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## **Abstract**

This study aims to identify the characteristics of effective leadership for quality early childhood programmes in the local settings of a sample of Hong Kong preschools. To achieve this aim, effective leadership was investigated from the multiple perspectives of various school stakeholders including school governors, principals, teachers, members of support staff and parents. The interactions between school leadership, in-school processes, school outcomes and school context were examined in depth.

One kindergarten and one child care centre were selected for study, both of which were rated as 'excellent' in the external validation of the quality assurance inspections of a local education authority. Data were collected from semi-structured, individual and group interviews, and the analysis of data was conducted based on the model of Attride-Stirling's Thematic Network (2001). As perceived by various school stakeholders, the school principals tended to take up three major roles: role model, school manager, and mentor for curriculum and pedagogy. Characteristics of the associated patterns of the three leadership roles were similar to those of moral, managerial and instructional leadership documented in the literature. More importantly, research findings indicated that leadership was largely centralized in the hands of the school principals in this study. There was a gap between the form of centralized leadership in the case studies and the conceptual model of participative leadership experienced in many Western developed countries.

Discussions drawn from the results of this study mainly focus on three areas: conflicts between market forces and professional values, dilemma between centralization and decentralization of school leadership, and sustainable development of the preschools. The implications of this study for professional development, leadership practice and government support are discussed and its implications for theoretical literature and further research are also presented.

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## **Chapter 1      Background and Rationale of the Study**

### **1.1      The Quest for Quality Early Childhood Education**

There have been calls for increasing attention to the study of school improvement over the past few decades. These have been associated with the global movement of education reform. In this respect, the situation in Hong Kong is similar to that experienced in many other Western countries. As reported in the World Economic Forum, Hong Kong's position in the Global Competitiveness Index Rankings dropped from second position in 1997 to eleventh in 2006 (Lopez-Claros et al., 2006). Schools are regarded as one of the key factors in Hong Kong's sharply deteriorating position. The question of how schooling affects student learning is a public concern. The local government is actively pursuing policies on educational reform through efforts to decentralize education, raise standards, and increase accountability and professionalism (Education Commission, 2000). The quest for quality education has posed new challenges and placed significant demands on school principals. The issue of effective leadership is at the centre of current debates.

Despite the fact that preschooling is not compulsory in Hong Kong, over 95% of the young children between the ages of two to six years old attend either kindergartens or child care centres. The care and education provided by these

preschools<sup>1</sup> help to foster children's all-round development and lay the foundation for future education. Early experiences during this period will have an important effect on the subsequent development of the child. Identifying strategies to promote, improve and ensure the quality of early childhood programmes is at the forefront of the priorities in many developed countries (OECD, 2002). With a growing awareness of the importance of early years, the local government and the public have become increasingly concerned with the quality and development of preschool education. As relatively little is known about leadership and management in the local context, the policy and practice of preschool education is largely based on the research and literature on primary and secondary education or follows the trends in many Western developed countries. However, as Bottery (1992) argues, the practice of leadership and management is context-bound, and is mediated by the beliefs, values and aspirations of the leaders and the led. It is, therefore, problematic to assume that policy and practice relating to local preschool education should be drawn from the knowledge base of different educational sectors and other contexts.

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<sup>1</sup> The term "preschool" refers to both kindergartens and child care centres, including crèches, residential centers and day nurseries, which cater for various needs. Day nurseries provide day care services for children whose parents are both working. Crèches and residential centers serve children who lack normal family care and provide either permanent family services or residential care. After the harmonization of pre-primary services in 2006, kindergartens, registered with the Education and Manpower Bureau, provide services for children from three to six years old. Child care centres, on the other hand, are registered with the Social Welfare Department and include nurseries, catering for children aged two to three; and crèches, looking after infants from birth to two.

The research conducted by Rao and her colleagues (2003: 331) shows that the quality of early childhood programmes in the Hong Kong context is primarily related to structural and management-related measures. They found that “the structural aspects of programmes, which indicate high quality early education, have to be combined with good management practices”. This conclusion is based on interviews with preschool principals and observations of preschool classrooms. The report of this research clearly indicates that there is a need for increasing the stringency of regulatory requirements and providing more training focusing on the management of preschools. Similar to those from diverse countries and different school contexts, this research result reveals the links between school management and the quality of programmes.



## **1.2 Aims and Purpose of the Study**

Much of the existing literature discusses the central importance of leadership in processes related to school effectiveness and improvement (Senge, 1990; Hallinger and Murphy, 1991; Caldwell, 1993; Grace, 1995; Fullan, 2001; Sergiovanni, 2001; Foskett and Lumby, 2003). There have been a variety of conceptual models proposed for the study of school leadership in the past few decades. They can be broadly categorized into instructional, transactional and transformational, moral, participative, managerial and contingency leadership. Leithwood and Duke (1999) point out that these theoretical models still place excessive emphasis on the practices and internal processes of an individual person designated as “leader”. Day et al. (2000: 15) also argue that the previous research has relied too heavily on school principals themselves as the primary source of data on leadership in schools. “Researchers should turn their attention to alternative perspectives of different stakeholders in order to gain an insight into the richness of the leadership phenomenon in the new era of change”. The work of Day and his colleagues is a great source of inspiration for me to develop a study on preschool leadership. As mentioned previously, the research conducted by Roa et al. reveals the links between school management and the quality of programmes. Interviewing preschool principals and making class observations are the major sources of data collection. The research however does not explore the leadership practice and process from the perspectives held by various school stakeholder groups and the influencing factors involved. To further enrich the area of research into effective leadership in local preschools, the aim of my study is:

- to investigate the nature of effective leadership in preschools from the perspectives held by school principals and different stakeholders within school contexts and identify the contextual factors influencing the leadership process and practice and programme quality. In this way the intention is to provide the knowledge-base for leadership preparation and professional development.

To achieve the aim of this study, four main objectives are specifically set out:

- to describe the characteristics of effective leadership for quality early childhood programmes in the Hong Kong context;
- to outline how school principals and different stakeholders perceive the leadership roles in relation to programme quality;
- to delineate some of the factors and forces identified by the school principals and different stakeholders that promote and impede leadership practice in the quality process; and
- to identify the key tensions and dilemmas that impact on effective leadership of preschools in Hong Kong, drawing on the data arising from this study and a review of the wider literature.

Seeking to achieve the above objectives, the following list of research questions was used as a heuristic guide in the development of this study:

- How do school principals and different stakeholders within preschools define effective leadership? What are the similarities and differences between the various views?
- How do school principals and different stakeholders perceive the characteristics of effective leadership? What are the similarities and differences between the various views?
- How do school principals and different stakeholders perceive the relationships between the leaders and the led?
- How do school principals and different stakeholders define quality early childhood programmes? What are the similarities and differences between the various views?
- How do school principals and different stakeholders perceive the discourse of leadership at different levels of operation in the quality process?
- How do school principals and different stakeholders perceive their own leadership roles in the quality process?
- What are the perceptions of school principals and different stakeholders about the factors and forces promoting and impeding leadership practice in relation to programme quality?

### **1.3 Significance of the Study**

In view of the fact that minimal literature and research has been conducted on leadership and management in Hong Kong preschools, the results generated from this study will serve several purposes. First, this study will be of interest to early childhood practitioners working in Hong Kong. It will provide an understanding of how preschool principals and different stakeholders within school contexts define and operationalize leadership. It will also give a fuller awareness of similarities and differences in the stakeholders' perspectives. It may assist the field in creating a platform for dialogue from which effective strategies for professional leadership practice can be derived. Second, along with growing recognition of effective leadership, the study will be of interest to teacher educators in higher education. The results and findings can be considered as the knowledge-base for leadership preparation and professional development. Third, it provides a reference point for practicing and future principals to develop their own practices in the process of school improvement and development. In addition, it will be of interest to the policy makers. I will identify the area of government support for strengthening preschool leadership and management.

#### **1.4 Background of the Researcher**

According to Strauss and Corbin (1998: 46-48), it is inevitable that the researchers will bring to the inquiry their own background of professional and disciplinary knowledge and experience. I was aware that I might consciously and unconsciously have biased attitudes towards some of the theoretical constructs and practices of school leadership and management. It is useful to define and locate my understanding of preschool leadership in relation to my own biographical influences and theoretical preferences. This section is to allow my audience to be more aware of my background and hence to be more aware of any possible biases that I might have extended to my study.

I obtained my bachelor of social science and completed the postgraduate diploma in education in Hong Kong. I started working as a vice principal for a group of thirteen kindergartens for two years. I was mainly responsible for curriculum development and staff training. During that period, I worked closely with frontline teachers and head teachers of school branches on a day-to-day basis. I found that teacher training and school leadership might be critical to the programme quality. To advance my knowledge and professional competence, I undertook further studies in the United States and obtained my Master of Education from the University of Hawaii. Up to the present, I have been teaching early childhood education programmes in the Hong Kong Polytechnic University for ten years. I am also the advisor to three preschools and the consultant to several school development projects. These projects provide me with opportunities to collaborate

with front-line teachers, parents and preschool principals in the process of curriculum innovation and change. In 2000, I was appointed as the chairperson and member of three government committees and I was elected to the Executive Committee of the World Organization of Early Childhood Education (Hong Kong Branch) in 2005. This involvement has advanced my understanding of local preschool education at policy and macro level.

I have endeavoured as far as possible to recognize my biases and particular theoretical lens that I bring to the study as a result of my background. For instance, I have to be more self-conscious concerning my own inclination to the belief in participative processes in the school leadership. Recognizing these possible biases, I have attempted to be more sensitive to the responses of the informants and to remain constantly self-reflective during the research process. I have also tried to keep my mind open to new ways of looking at the leadership phenomena.

## **1.5 Organization of the Dissertation**

There are eight chapters in this dissertation. Chapter Two provides a review of the literature focusing on four key concepts: school leadership, process, quality and context. This will lay the foundation for further discussion. In particular, these concepts are closely articulated to the conceptual framework developed in Chapter Four. Chapter Three describes the research methodologies, with a focus on the constructivist paradigm, a qualitative approach and case study methodology. This section will provide the epistemological basis for the research design and methods that I adopted in my study. The trustworthiness of this study will also be discussed in this chapter. Chapter Four explains the conceptual framework of my research design and documents the research process including the pilot study, data collection, data management and analysis. Chapter Five presents a general background of the case study schools and the profiles of informants that I interviewed. I will highlight their similarities and differences in order to enable my audience to better understand the characteristics of the various stakeholder groups in the schools. Chapter Six focuses on the discussion and analysis of the multiplicity of the school stakeholders' perspectives relating to the research themes. I will also summarize the findings of each theme separately. Chapter Seven discusses the themes which emerged from the interviews. I try to put these observations into context by discussing them in relation to the local circumstances and the theories documented in the literature. In the final chapter, I will provide a discussion of the main findings of the study and draw out the implications of my research for professional development, leadership practice and government

support. I will also set out ideas for further research in the area of preschool leadership in Hong Kong.



## **Chapter 2     Literature Review**

To address the research questions, this chapter attempts to give a review of four key concepts: school leadership, quality, process and context. The following section describes different definitions, perspectives and theoretical models used to explore leadership. Then, I will discuss the quality discourse in early childhood education from the global and local perspectives. Subsequently, I will explain the concepts of change management and learning organization in relation to school improvement and leadership. Finally, four aspects of local preschool education will be discussed to provide a context for understanding the field in Hong Kong.

### **2.1     Conceptualization of School Leadership**

#### **2.1.1   School Leadership and Management**

The terms “leadership” and “management” are sometimes used interchangeably because these activities are often carried out in schools by the same people and at the same time. In recent years, a distinction has been drawn between the two concepts. West-Burnham (1992) suggests that leadership concerns vision, strategy, creating direction and transformation of the organization, whereas management concerns effective implementation of the vision, operational matters, ensuring the organization is run effectively and efficiently to achieve its goals. Burnes (1996: 152) suggests that the roles of leader include the roles of manager and often, *vice versa*. Leaders and managers overlap considerably and the difference between

them is largely a matter of management style. A convergent management style is focused on stability and predictability and an ability to optimize resources to implement policy, whereas a divergent style is focused on creating new visions rather than accepting the status quo.

Bush and Coleman (2000: 4) conceptualize the notions of leadership and management in the contexts of the external and internal environments. They argue that the role of leadership focuses more on school development linking to the external environment of changing forces, while the role of management focuses more on the running of educational organizations linking to the internal environment of operation. However, the boundary between the internal and external environment is blurred as schools have become more “open” and “permeable”. The model of this non-traditional schooling is characterized by interdisciplinary curriculum content, discovery learning, extensive student choices, multiple modes of assessment, interdependent roles of teachers and high levels of school-community links (Hoyle, 1975). The complex nature of schooling and education makes the concern for how the quality of effective leadership can be identified and fostered more significant than ever before.

### **2.1.2 Conceptual Models of Leadership**

There have been a variety of conceptual models proposed in the study of school leadership. Leithwood and Duke (1999) provide a synthesis of the contemporary leadership literature from four journals: *Educational Administration Quarterly*,

*Journal of School Leadership, Journal of Educational Administration, and Educational Management and Administration.* They propose a six-fold classification of leadership concepts that subsumes an initial, more specific set of 20 types (Table 1)<sup>2</sup>.

**Table1: Categories and Concepts of Educational Leadership**

Categories and concepts	Summary of explanations
1. Instructional	Concerning the effects and outcomes of leadership practices in terms of defining school mission, managing instructional programme, supervising instruction, and promoting school culture, etc. (Duke, 1987; Smith and Andrews, 1989; Hallinger and McCary, 1990).
2. Transformational <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• charismatic</li> <li>• visionary</li> <li>• cultural</li> <li>• empowering</li> </ul>	Conceptualized by the continuum of transformational and transactional leadership in which the former concept refers to the focus of leadership on higher levels of commitment, collective aspirations, and capacities of organizational members; and the latter emphasizes the focus of leadership on changing economic, political and psychological “things”. (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985; Kowalski and Oates, 1993; Leithwood, 1994; Dillard, 1995; Leithwood, Tomlinson and Genge, 1996).
3. Moral <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• democratic</li> <li>• normative-instrumental</li> </ul>	Arguing values and ethics as a central part of leadership; addressing the significance of a leader’s commitment to the higher level values;

<sup>2</sup> Note: The content of the table is summarized from Leithwood, K. and Duke, D. (1999) A century’s quest to understand school leadership, in Murphy, J. and Louis, K. S. (Eds) *Handbook of Research on Educational Administration* pp. 45-72

Categories and concepts	Summary of explanations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• symbolic</li> <li>• political</li> </ul>	and entailing role demands in the areas of moral, instructional, political, managerial, and social/interpersonal (Hodgkinson, 1978 and 1991; Greenfield, 1991; Evers and Lakomski, 1991; Reeves, 1992; Bates, 1993; Duke, 1996).
4. Participative <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• group</li> <li>• shared</li> <li>• teacher</li> </ul>	Moving towards forms of shared or team leadership that stress the decision-making process of the group to enhance organizational effectiveness in the context of socio-political changes (Pickersgill, 1992; Vandenberghe, 1992; Murphy and Hallinger, 1992; Yuki, 1994; Hayes, 1995).
5. Managerial/Strategic <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• organizational</li> </ul>	Mainly focusing on the functions, tasks, or behaviours of the leader and assuming that if these functions are carried out competently, the work of others in the organization will be facilitated (Massie, 1965; Zaleznick, 1970; Bennis and Nanus, 1985; Rossmiller, 1992; Spencer, 1993; Bolman and Deal, 1994; Duke and Leithwood, 1994; Myers and Murphy, 1995).
6. Contingency/Styles <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• problem solving</li> <li>• craft/reflective</li> </ul>	With problem-solving orientations to leadership, this concept involves an underlying assumption that there are wide variations in the contexts for leadership and that to be effective these contexts require different leadership styles of responding to the unique organizational circumstances (Blake and Mouton, 1964; Hersey and Blanchard, 1977; Sergiovanni, 1989; Leithwood and Steinbach, 1995; Allison, 1996).

As briefly mentioned in Chapter One, Leithwood and Duke (1999: 65) argue that these theoretical models lay too much emphasis on the roles and functions carried out by an individual person designated as “leader”. They argue that these categories do not provide alternative solutions to the same problem. Rather, these concepts focus attention on different aspects of organization.

Recently, the idea of distributed leadership is attracting a sharply rising degree of interest. Spillane and his colleagues (2004: 11) suggest that the new form of distributed leadership is distinct from that of positional leaders. Distributed leadership is built on the concepts of shared values, norms of collaboration and a sense of collective responsibility. This leadership model is grounded in the interaction of people and contexts in school environments and is best understood as a practice distributed over leaders, followers and their situation. Karlsen (2000) highlights the tension between the dichotomy of centralization and decentralization in the process of distributing leadership. In a study of educational governance in Norway and Canada from a macro-perspective, Karlsen uses the term “decentralized centralism” to describe systems where “decentralization movements from the centre to periphery and centralization movements in the opposite direction will normally lead to tension” (p.526). The concept of distributed leadership is also acknowledged by Harris and Day (2003: 96). These two scholars identify successful leadership from their study, and state that it involves distributing leadership and building the community of the school through

developing and involving various school stakeholders. The orthodoxy of a singular form of leadership has been challenged and replaced by a plural form of leadership.

In addition to the discussion on singular and plural leadership, the current trend of globalization has set up a new focus for deliberation in the field of educational leadership. Globalization is commonly portrayed “as the widening, deepening and speeding up of world-wide interconnectedness in all aspects of contemporary social life...” (Held et al., 1999: 2). It has assumed increased significance with current attention being directed towards the impact of globalization on the development of leadership from a cross-cultural perspective. Leadership theorists attempt to understand the leadership phenomenon in terms of some assumptions related to societal culture. Hofstede (1991, 2001) recognizes that there are four cultural dimensions that are useful when discussing the effectiveness of the leadership models across cultures. They are collectivism versus individualism, masculinity versus femininity, uncertainty avoidance and power distance. In addition, Ayman et al. (2000) use a fifth dimension, fatalism, to differentiate between cultures, especially between western and oriental cultures. Dimmock and Walker (1998: 564) express concern with an alleged inappropriate translation of the ideas between different contexts and the potential loss of cultural distinctiveness. They state,

“[Western] paradigms tend to be adopted uncritically and unquestioningly by academics and practitioners in societies and cultures that bear little similarity to those in which the theories originated.”

In other words, translating values between different cultural contexts tends to be vulnerable as all values are contextually bounded in nature (Gronn, 2001: 404). Research on cultural differences in educational leadership makes the point that considerable social and cultural change should proceed through conscious deliberation and choice (e.g. Schermerhorn and Bond, 1997; Walker and Dimmock, 2000).

Adopting a cultural approach to leadership, Wong (2001: 318) explores the influences of Confucianism on moral obligation and practice of leadership. He attempts to connect an emergent theme of moral leadership in Western schools to a longer tradition in Chinese Culture. His argument on the construct of moral leadership has a strong grounding in the value system of intellect traditions of China. He recommends that efforts should be made to explore ways to prepare potential leaders for demonstrating these values and ethical considerations.

From a philosophical perspective, Guskey and Huberman (1995) explain that each of these models has its own theoretical assumptions and is informed by different bodies of research. These models reflect different perspectives or worldviews and different prescriptions for improvement.

## **2.2 The Quality Discourse in Early Childhood Education**

### **2.2.1 The Rise of Quality Assurance**

The concepts of “quality” and “quality assurance” were first introduced within the world of business in the 1920s. It has gained new momentum in the post-war years. The “quality assurance” orthodoxy moved to the top of many governments’ public services agendas in the 1980s (Dahlberg et al., 1999). Quality is often understood as “compliance with the requirements” but this concept is contested and occupies an ambiguous position in contemporary societies. Conrad (1994: 304) reminds us that “quality is a multi-dimensional concept and its interpretation is dependent on the interests of the different actors in the process and outcomes in the enterprise.” In the private market, “quality closely links into service demand” and is perceived by the consumer, while in the public sector, “services aim to promote some changes in society” (Shaw, 2000: 57).

Education has been incorporated into the overall economic and social restructuring in modern societies. The concepts of “quality” and “quality assurance” drawn from private markets are used in the field of education. Education is now characterized by a range of structural alignments, new relationships between purchasers and providers, school effectiveness and educational productivity, and regulatory and monitoring processes (Morley and Rassool, 1999). Specifically, Srikanthan and Dalrymple (2004: 276) argue that quality assurance can be seen as having two aspects: improvement and accountability. “The focus should be on improvement



with accountability being a consequence. If improvement is addressed properly, the evidence for accountability will be developed automatically. On the other hand, a focus on accountability can result in lowering of quality outcome”.

### **2.2.2 The Global Movement**

The quality of early childhood institutions has received increasing public attention over the past few decades (Benhabib, 1992). In the current view, the function of early childhood institutions has begun to shift from child rearing to developmental nurturing. This rapidly growing concern closely links up with wider movements put forward by supranational organizations and international agencies. The OECD (2001: 7) states,

“Early development is seen as the foundation of lifelong learning. When sustained by effective fiscal, social and employment measures in support of parents and communities, early childhood programming can help to provide a fair start in life for all children and contribute to social integration”.

The World Bank’s Education Sector (1999) also made a far-reaching proposal for education policy in the area of early intervention. Its *Strategy Report* focused on early child development and school health programmes. Bennett (2004), Programme Manager of the OECD Early Childhood Reviews, defines three broad sets of quality criteria for the curricular framework in early childhood settings as follows:

“By orientation quality is understood the quality of the guiding national curricular or pedagogical framework; the pedagogical concepts of the educators and their values, as well as their understandings of early childhood and early education. By structural quality is meant adequate investment in the system; favourable child/staff ratios; the level of certification and professional development of educators; and the adequacy of buildings, resources and learning environments. The third set of criteria, interaction or procedural quality – that is, the quality of relationships and of the socio-pedagogical interaction between educators and children, between the team of educators, and among the children themselves”. (p.1)

Recently, Hong Kong has been actively involved in worldwide education reforms, which follow the general trends of globalisation. For example, the government provided funding to a local university to develop the Hong Kong Programme for International Student Assessment (HKPISA). The project is part of the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment. This example illustrates the global agenda on the quality of education has a significant influence on the development of education in Hong Kong. Probably, the local preschool education will follow the trend of the global movement for improving early childhood programmes.

### **2.2.3 The Local Reform**

As proposed in the *Education Commission Report No. 7*, a quality assurance framework was introduced in 1997 for improving school effectiveness through school self-evaluation and external school review (Education Commission, 1997).

The quality assurance discourse was advanced again in the local education reform in 2000.

The quality assurance inspections (QAI) were first conducted in primary and secondary schools on a voluntarily basis in 2000 and then became mandatory in 2002. Although preschools are privately operated and receive no direct government funding, this non-subsidized sector also embarked on the reform agenda, in the same way as primary and secondary schools. The Education and Manpower Bureau (formerly the Education Department) published the first edition of *Performance Indicators* for preschools in 2000. Adopting the ideology of “child-centeredness” and “developmentally appropriate practice”, the document addresses the importance of the individual needs and interest of young children, and the particular form and content of education tailored to each of them (Bredekamp, 1997). The quality assurance inspections were formally conducted in kindergartens in 2002 and will be extended to child care centres in 2007. The set of indicators comprises four domains: management and organization, learning and teaching, support for children and school ethos, and child development. School performance is graded at four levels: unsatisfactory, acceptable, good, and excellent. The QAI summary reports were published to inform the public of the general performance of the schools inspected and the major areas of concern. Inevitably, parents use these reports as a basis for choosing schools for their children. The quality assurance policy establishes a new framework for the service and functions of preschools in terms of quality and accountability.

## **2.3 Process of Change and School Improvement**

### **2.3.1 Management of Change**

The concept of change management has emerged since the 1960s. It is primarily concerned with individual and group level interventions to support incremental organizational development (Bennis, 1969). Morrison (1998: 13) defines change as

“...a dynamic and continuous process of development and growth that involves reorganization in response to ‘felt needs’. It is a process of transformation, a flow from one state to another, either initiated by internal factors or external factors, involving individuals, groups or institutions, leading to a realignment of existing values, practices and outcomes.”

Mintzberg (1987) argues that whether change is highly planned or less planned in detail is a matter of conjecture. He emphasizes that where it is pre-planned and predictable in nature, change can be sequenced and the process can be planned to achieve the stated goals of that organization. Alternatively, he also deals with change that is an emergent approach that begins with the assumption that change is continuous, open-ended and a largely unpredictable process to align and realign the organization because of the changing environment of that organization.

Holbeche (2006: 5-6) classifies organizational change into four types: transactional, incremental, radical and transformational. The author describes transactional change as “the ongoing modification to the day-to-day operation of

an organization”. Incremental change may be significant change but it is gradual. “It requires rapid and fundamental shifts in behaviour which provoke employee resistance”. Most organizations experience radical change at some point in their life cycle, such as starting up, expanding and downsizing. Radical change tends to be accompanied by a high degree of involvement on the part of people affected by the change. “In responding to the rapidly changing circumstances in the marketplace, transformational change may be needed for survival. It aims at helping an organization regain strategic alignment with its environment”. This kind of change is required to challenge the basic assumptions underpinning the organization.

Leadership is considered important in times of change when conditions are unstable, vague and ambiguous. The challenge of leadership is to maximize the organization’s capabilities at all levels so that people are motivated to achieve the organizational goals. This leads Morrison (1998) to consider that four processes are essential for effective leadership. The first is the process of visioning, creating a sense of direction and purpose. The second is the process of organizational design, creating the structures, processes, procedures, patterns of working and resources to make the strategy realizable. The third is the process of enabling people with the support they need to perform the task. And the fourth is the process of valuing, creating a sense of community with strong values. In view of the complex nature of change, Chapman (2002: 22) argues that the paradoxical challenge to the role of leadership is to be able “to create both a sense of stability

for employees while promoting ongoing change to secure the future of the organization”.

### **2.3.2 Organization Learning for Improvement**

Currently, the concept of educational change has been coupled with the contemporary construction of a knowledge society. The discourse involves the state tightening the connections between schooling, employment, productivity and trade. The global trend of educational change is moving towards school-based management, quality assurance, increased demands for accountability, marketization of education, and greater involvement of various stakeholders. These driving forces make schools strive to continually improve their effectiveness in order to increase academic achievement.

The literature on organizations (e.g. Stoll and Fink, 1996) describes school improvement as a set of processes, managed from within the school, targeted both at student achievement and the school’s ability to manage change. Reynolds (1999: 5) differentiates the concept of school improvement from school effectiveness. That is “if effectiveness describes above-expectation academic achievement of students, improvement is a sustained upward trend in effectiveness”. In popular use, the terms “school improvement” and “school effectiveness” tend to be used interchangeably.

Fullan (1993, 1999) argues that a process of school improvement includes three phases: initiation, implementation and institutionalization. Initiation refers to the process leading up to and including a decision to adopt or proceed with a change; implementation refers to attempting to put an idea or reform into practice; and institutionalization refers to building the innovation into everyday practice. Fullan also identifies some key themes in school improvement that include vision-building, initiative-taking and empowerment, staff development and resource assistance, restructuring, monitoring and problem-coping, and evolutionary planning. Extensive research has also revealed that in the process of improvement, the schools learn continually to adapt themselves to the changing forces in their internal and external environments and the role of leadership in these schools puts emphasis on supporting individual learning, improving team effectiveness and developing organizational capacity (e.g. Argyris and Schon, 1996; Robinson, 2001).

Associated with the concept of school improvement, Senge's work provides the construct of an organization being regarded as a learning organization.

“Learning organizations are organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning to see the whole together.” (Senge, 1990: 3)

There are five disciplines in the model of a learning organization: systems thinking, personal mastery, mental models, team learning, and shared vision. Systems

thinking refers to a deep understanding of the dynamic relationships between components of problems; personal mastery refers to the learning process of expanding personal capacity in order to achieve goals; mental models refers to people's assumptions in making decisions for their actions; team learning refers to enhancing organizational capacities and improving team effectiveness; and shared vision refers to the dialogue process for convincing and confronting one's own and others' assumptions (Alvai and McCormick, 2004: 409-411). Building on Senge's work, Lam (2001: 217) recognizes that apart from the primary drive for organizational learning from external sources, there are three major internal sources or factors which influence collective learning capacities. They are transformational leadership, school culture and decentralized structure. Morley and Hosking (2003) also offer us a view of leadership that rests on an interpretation of a learning organization that emphasizes diffused and fluid leadership.

There have been different perspectives on the concepts of organizational learning for improvement depending on different contexts. Above all, many theorists place a heavy emphasis on the role of leaders and leadership in enacting change, which by definition requires the creation of a new system and then helping bring out the potential of others to achieve the goals (e.g. Kotter, 1996).

### **2.3.3 The Local Experience of School Improvement**

Predicting the trend of educational change in the new century, Cheng (1997: 73) sees local reform in primary and secondary schools as an integral part of the



worldwide trend. In order to cope with the challenges arising from educational reforms, school restructuring movements have been going on, in the search for school improvement. The following is the local experience of educational change in primary and secondary education. It will give some hints of the trend of preschools in the local setting.

Local researchers are well aware of the reform movement that places new demands on school leadership. Cheng (2003) argues that local school leaders are challenged by three waves of the education reform: improvement of teaching and learning, greater accountability and quality assurance, and pursuit of future effectiveness. Kwok et al. (1997: 60) also find school leaders confronted with “more serious students’ problems, higher expectations from parents and the public, greater demand for accountability from the local education authority and school sponsoring bodies and the global outcry for professionalization in the education sector.”

Lam (2003) suggests that the role of the school principals in Hong Kong is caught between the focus on stability and change. “Stability is derived from the institutional traditions, societal culture and the psychological orientation of educators. The forces of change are based in radical political, economic and social environmental transformation” (p.175). School administrators in Hong Kong seem traumatized by the dilemmas involved in finding a balance between these opposing forces. He also argues that the local school principals “tend to follow directives from the EMB sheepishly”. The strategies adopted in the change process

appear to be passive, fragmented, and peripheral. Conformity to authority has always been the mode of operation for the majority of school heads in Hong Kong.

Preschools are not a subsidized sector and have fewer formal structures than the primary and secondary schools. Despite this, preschool principals are facing problems and challenges in the process of organizational change similar to those for primary and secondary school principals, because of the general situation of education reform in the local context. More significantly, the market-driven nature of preschooling in Hong Kong poses a challenge for the preschool principals in building up the cutting edge for the competition.

## **2.4 The Preschool Context in Hong Kong**

### **2.4.1 The Quasi-market Environment**

Preschool education in Hong Kong is not mandatory or required by law but almost every young child has received a few years of schooling before they enter primary school. As mentioned in Chapter One, the enrolment figure for children aged two to six who attend preschools is nearly 95% which is close to the 99.8% enrolment in primary schools (Census and Statistical Department, 2005). The underlying factors of this phenomenon are the growing demands of working parents, competition for admission to certain prestigious primary schools, and preparation for formal learning in primary schools (Oppen, 1992: 13). Although the majority of young children attend preschools, the government is reluctant to turn early childhood education into a fully aided sector. This is on the grounds that the benefits of early childhood education to the later stage of development are not strongly confirmed by extensive research (Education Commission, 1986). The development of the local field has then germinated from this historical root.

All preschools including both kindergartens and child care centres are private, either profit-making or non-profit-making. Most funding for profit-making kindergartens comes from fees. Non-profit kindergartens often located in public housing estates, can apply for direct assistance through the Rates and Rent Reimbursement Scheme and fee support for needy parents. Full-day nurseries are for children whose parents are both working. Parents of low-income families can

apply for a subsidy from the government. Overall, most nurseries and kindergartens rely on school fees for their funding. In other words, the local field is privately run and market-driven.

Recent statistics indicate that the natural increase rate (i.e. births less deaths) decreased from 31.8 per thousand in 1997, to 8.1 in 2004 (Census and Statistics Department, 2005). If we apply knowledge of market theory to education, the rapid decrease in birth-rate after 1997 has turned the sector into an oversupplied market. This is confirmed by the statistics that the number of student enrolments in kindergartens decreased from 175.1 per thousand in 1998 to 136.1 in 2003 (Census and Statistics Department, 2004). In this educational market, parents who are the service buyers have indirect but strong influential power on school decision-making.

#### **2.4.2 The New Meaning of Preschool Service**

The rapid economic development after the Second War World altered family child-rearing patterns in Hong Kong. Historically, the public perceived the preschool service as a preparation for primary school and as a custodial service. Having a caregiver with specialized professional training did not seem to be given importance by parents. This was reflected in the findings gathered by Oppen (1992: 128). The research shows that the most common reason for selecting a preschool, given by 57% of 2,874 parents, was location, followed by concern about the physical environment, the equipment and materials and the school's reputation.

Preschool teaching was and has been perceived as an extension of mothering, given the fact that preschools have to take on some aspects of childrearing in the realms of hygiene and feeding that are generally recognized as the domain of families. That has been the way that preschooling has been defined historically.

The *Key Statistics of the 2001 Population Census* indicated that the average domestic household size is getting smaller from 4.2 in 1976 to 3.1 in 2001 (Census and Statistics Department, 2002). The impact of demographic changes raises some questions in relation to the definition of preschool service: Are parents becoming more aware of the importance of early childhood education and its relevance to the development of young children? Or, do they still perceive the functions of preschooling as preparation for formal learning in primary schools and a custodial service for working parents? Such demographic changes may lead to a new view of early childhood education emerging in the public mind. Definitely, whichever way the roles and functions of preschools are defined, parental preference has strongly influenced the provision of preschooling.

### **2.4.3 The Preschool Teaching Force**

Preschool teacher education had long been characterized by minimal training (Oppen, 1992: 19). In the past, those who had 11 years of basic education without any formal prior training could register as permitted teachers in kindergartens and as trainee workers in child care centres. No formal knowledge-base was designated

as a prerequisite for entry into the “profession”, and practice was largely drawn from the experiences of those serving at the front line.

Issues relating to the formation and transformation of the preschool teaching force did not reach the agenda of policymakers until 1997. In response to a public call for higher quality preschool education, the EMB made efforts to speed up the pace of upgrading teacher education and qualifications. Two measures were introduced: raising the standard of entry requirements to a one year full-time pre-service training in 2003, and requiring kindergarten principals and child-care centre supervisors to receive advanced training at higher diploma level in 2005 (Hong Kong Government, 1997, 1999, 2000). To further speed up the pace of upgrading of the teaching force, the local government has announced in the *2006-07 Policy Address* that all kindergarten teachers will have obtained a Diploma in Early Childhood Education and all kindergarten principals will be qualified at degree level by 2011-12 (Hong Kong Government, 2006: 16). In line with the government’s intention, local training institutions started offering bachelor degree programmes a few years ago and some of them are launching master programmes.

Despite the fact that the upgraded training policy has been introduced for nearly ten years, the majority of the front-line teachers still hold qualifications at a sub-degree level. Though the statistical profile of the professional qualifications of preschool teachers is not publicly available, the in-service higher diploma and degree programmes offered by local institutions are in great demand, and this is evidence for the need for further upgrading. Relatively few of the practitioners

have received their professional training at a degree or postgraduate level. Therefore, the overall qualifications of preschool practitioners in the local field is low and there is a big gap in professional qualifications among them.

The historical development of the local field mentioned above raises a concern about the professional identity of the preschool teachers. Professional identity can refer to the perception of oneself as a professional and it is closely related to the knowledge and responsibilities one has and the work one does (Bucher and Stelling, 1977). A body of formal knowledge that practitioners profess that separates them from the laity and the acquisition of that formal knowledge through higher education and lengthy training are the distinguishing features of a profession (Hughes et al., 1973). Therefore, preschool teaching in Hong Kong is obviously not the type of occupation classified as a profession and preschool teachers are seldom regarded as professionals. Preschool teachers generally have a rather weak professional identity.

#### **2.4.4 The Organization and Structure of Preschools**

Up to the present time, there is no territory-wide research into the organization and structure of local preschools, except for the aforementioned study conducted by Oppen in 1992. Although the data were collected for more than ten years, which cannot fully reflect the present picture of the local field, it is still a useful reference for understanding the organization and structure of local preschools. Findings in that study indicate that preschools in Hong Kong have a variety of sponsors

including religious organizations, voluntary agencies and profit-making organizations. A large number of kindergartens are operated by non-profit, voluntary agencies and religious organizations and most of the child care centers are set up by non-profit, voluntary agencies to provide services for the children of working parents. Some preschools are run independently and many others are operated together with a number of sibling schools by their parent organizations. For those kindergartens or child care centres that are operated by the parent organizations, they are coordinated by the head offices and follow same management policies.

The study also indicated that the average size of institution was 370 children and 15 teachers per school. Since the number of preschools, enrollment and teachers are decreasing due to the declining birth rate, the present average size of schools and number of teachers per school are presumably getting smaller than in 1992. This can be partly confirmed by the statistics provided by the EMB. In the sample of 30 kindergartens inspected in 2002-03, the average number of classes was around 10 (Education and Manpower Bureau, 2003). Generally, the staff composition of a kindergarten consists of a principal, a senior teacher and a small team of teachers while the staff of a nursery includes a supervisor, an assistant supervisor and registered child care workers. The school structure is relatively simple. A simple organizational structure has a strategic advantage in providing direct supervision and co-ordination. However, flexibility in the use of financial and manpower resources would vary in the different organizational settings of the local preschools. Generally speaking, it would be limited to those schools running



independently. On the other hand, more flexibility is allowed for those operated together with a number of sibling schools by their parent organizations. It is a key source of competitive advantage for those being run by the same agency.

## **Chapter 3     Research Methodology**

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the research methods used in my study. It begins with an overview of different research paradigms. I will then explain my rationale for adopting a constructivist perspective and using a qualitative methodology. This is followed by a discussion on the use of case study methods for data collection and the general interview guide approach for interviewing. I will also spell out the reasons for using metaphorical responses in this study. The quality criteria for a qualitative research will be discussed in the last section of this chapter.

### **3.1     Overview of Major Research Paradigms**

Conducting research involves defining a research problem, specifying the research questions, designing the research methods, collecting, analyzing and interpreting data and reporting results. Before carrying out all of these steps, there are several fundamental questions that I have to pose to myself as a researcher: “What is my belief about ontology (What kind of being is the human being? What is the nature of reality?), epistemology (What is the relationship between the inquirer and the known?), and methodology (How do we know the world, or gain knowledge of it?)” (Guba, 1990: 18). The interpretive framework that I adopt reflects the basic set of beliefs that guide my actions throughout the research process.

It is essential for qualitative researchers to be aware of the influence of philosophy on strategies of research. With knowledge of related philosophy, I as a researcher

can choose an appropriate lens through which I can understand meanings that people give to their experiences or to social phenomena. The way that I understand research paradigms will also guide my research approach, research questions and research methods. I therefore reviewed different research paradigms in the literature, and provide a brief summary below.

A paradigm is “the entire constellation of beliefs, values, and techniques shared by members of a given scientific community” (Kuhn 1970: 75). To understand the paradigm of a piece of research is the key to analyze, interpret, and evaluate that particular piece of research. In other words, a paradigm is a worldview providing an ideological framework to explain, understand, and interpret the human world which the human actors are acting on.

Starting from the Enlightenment period, four inquiry paradigms have emerged: positivism, postpositivism, constructivism, and critical theory. They are called the “competing” or “alternative” research paradigms in the sense that they adopt different ideological positions. The aim of inquiry within positivism and postpositivism is “explanation, ultimately enabling the prediction and control of phenomena” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989: 211). In the positivist and postpositivist paradigms, the object of study is independent of the researcher; knowledge is discovered and verified through direct observation or measurement of the phenomena (Krauss, 2005: 759). Therefore, researchers aim at disclosing the "objective" facts.

Constructivism aims at “understanding and reconstruction of the constructions that people (including the inquirer) initially hold” (Guba and Lincoln, 1989: 211). This alternative view is that knowledge is established through the meanings attached to the phenomena studied and researchers interact with the subjects of study to obtain data. Many qualitative researchers do not assume that there is a single unitary reality apart from our perceptions. Since each of us experiences a different reality, the phenomenon of “multiple realities” exists. The best way to understand any social phenomenon is to view it in its context without losing the importance of the whole phenomenon (Krauss, 2005: 759-760).

Critical theory is the “critique and transformation of the social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic and gender structures that constrain and exploit humankind, by engagement in confrontation, even conflict” (Guba and Lincoln, 1989: 211). Oka and Shaw (2000) elaborate the definition of critical theory that it includes the basic paradigms of any qualitative research directed at empowering or emancipating social change through research. Therefore, research of this type should be very much related to social values, while the realization of social values is the purpose of the research.

### **3.2 Adopting a Constructivist Perspective**

Distinguishing among different types of inquiry should be of value for those involved in social research. “It facilitates judgements about what sort of work would best serve particular purposes, and what can and cannot reasonably be expected from any particular study” (Hammersley, 2000: 8). After reviewing research paradigms, I decided to adopt a constructivist perspective in this study. There are two reasons. First, this study is not to explain certain theory, test theory against hypotheses and predict the phenomena of preschool leadership in Hong Kong as a positivist or post-positivist approach might involve. Nor is it designed to challenge the social, political and cultural structure of the phenomena under investigation which is an aim of a critical theory approach. Second, the central focus of my research is to understand the nature of preschool leadership within a particular contemporary educational setting. It is concerned with understanding people’s perspectives [that is the emic, insider’s view] within their natural settings rather than the researcher’s perspective [that is the etic, outsider’s view] (Pike, 1954). Taking these reasons into consideration, I found that a constructivist perspective can provide me with a lens to see how preschool principals and different stakeholders define leadership and how they construct the meanings of this phenomenon within their school contexts.

### **3.3 Justifications for Using Qualitative Methodology**

This study fundamentally posits a constructivist paradigm. Denzin and Lincoln (2003: 35) argue that the underlying assumptions of this paradigm include three stances: a relativist ontology (there are multiple realities), a subjectivist epistemology (the knower and subject create understanding), and a naturalistic (in the natural world) set of methodological procedures. These two scholars (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003) also argue that qualitative methodology is multi-method in focus, involving an interpretative, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. They state,

“Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the researcher in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings and memos to the self.” (p. 4-5)

That is to say, qualitative researchers are concerned with the individual’s point of view in the world and try to get closer to the insider’s perspective through detailed interviewing and observation. By using qualitative methodology, the researchers can study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. In this study, the use of qualitative methodology allows me to probe the phenomena I am researching in context, which is important for understanding the complexity of leadership practice from the perspectives held by various school stakeholder groups and the influencing factors involved in the process. I therefore decided to

use a qualitative methodology for investigating the construction of school leadership in the local preschool settings.

### **3.4 Use of Case Study Methodology**

I used case study methodology in the research design for this study. The first reason for using case studies is that the contextual condition is pertinent to the leadership phenomenon. As suggested by Yin (2003: 13), a case study is an empirical inquiry that “investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident”. It provides opportunities to analyze contextual conditions in relation to the “case schools”. The second reason is that case studies are multi-perspective analyses. “This means that the researcher considers not just the voice and perspective of the actors, but also of the relevant groups of actors and the interaction between them” (Tellis, 1997). From this perspective, leadership is defined not only by context, but also by other groups of people involved in the situation. Therefore, using case studies in the research design fits well with the aim of this study - to investigate the multiple perspectives on effective leadership held by various school stakeholder groups and the interactions between school leadership, in-school processes, school outcomes and school context.

Basically, there are four types of designs for case studies, namely single-case (holistic) design, single-case (embedded) design, multiple-case (holistic) design, and multiple-case (embedded) design (Yin, 2003). The single versus multiple case studies respectively refer to the one and more than one cases selected in the study. The holistic versus embedded case studies refer to one unit of analysis within one case and more than one subunits of analysis within that case (Yin, 2003). To



address the research objectives of this study, I decided to use multiple-case (holistic) design for data collection.

When making the above decision, I took two factors into consideration: single-versus multiple-case studies and holistic versus embedded designs. Usually, the use of single case is justified when the case represents “a critical test of existing theory, a rare or unique circumstance, a representative or typical case, or it serves a revelatory or longitudinal purpose”. Otherwise, multiple-case studies are more often used because they can minimize “the chances of misrepresentation and maximize the access needed to collect case study evidence” (Yin, 2003: 45). Taking into account the potential vulnerability of a single-case study, I decided to choose a multiple-case study approach.

The rationale for using a holistic or embedded design depends on the type of phenomenon being studied and the research questions being asked. “The holistic design involves one unit of analysis and reflects one orientation of the initial research questions, whereas the embedded design involves more than one unit and/or subunits of analysis and involves different orientations of research questions that are brought to a case study inquiry” (Yin, 2003: 46). As mentioned in Section 1.2, my study attempts to investigate the multiplicity of views concerning effective leadership in preschools. The research questions for the preschool principals and different stakeholders are basically orientated to the same focus of the study which is the characteristics of effective leadership and how

leadership is defined by different school stakeholders. Therefore, I decided to use a holistic design in my study.

When using a multiple-case design, a question every researcher will encounter has to do with the number of cases deemed sufficient for his/her study. In view of limited time-frame and resources, I used two case study schools. I selected one kindergarten and one child care centre. Since I decided not to use the convenience sampling method, there was a question as to whether the two types of settings could be selected, and that depended on the accessibility and availability of potential case study schools. I will explain in more detail of the reason for selecting one kindergarten and one child centre in this study in Section 4.2.

The decision about the unit of analysis is a fundamental part of the research design that provides direction in later activities, such as designing research instruments and drawing appropriate samples of informants. It implies “a different kind of data collection, a different focus for the analysis of data, and a different level at which statements about findings and conclusions would be made” (Patton, 2002: 228). Often individual people, students, families, classrooms, or schools are the units of analysis in educational research. In view of the objectives of this study, I decided to use the individual preschools as the unit of analysis. The fundamental research question lies in how preschool principals and different stakeholders within the school context perceive the leadership practices for quality programmes. Choosing individual schools as the unit of analysis should be suitable for studying the personal constructs of preschool principals and different stakeholders in those

activities. This method can generate a holistic view of the effective leadership for quality programmes.

### **3.5 Choice of the General Interview Guide Approach**

Patton (1990) identifies three types of qualitative interview: the informal conversational interview, the general interview guide approach, and the standardized open-ended interview. They vary in the format and structure of questioning. In an informal conversational interview, “the format is less structured and questions emerge from the immediate context”. This type of interview is highly individualized. In the general interview guide approach, the interview is “semi-structured and the interviewer prepares an outline of topics to be covered but he/she is free to vary the wording and order of the questions to some extent”. In a standardized open-ended interview, “the format is structured that the interviewer adheres strictly to a script to cover all the questions” (Sewell, 2006).

I chose to use the general interview guide approach in this study. My rationale is that this type of interview is more systematic than the conversational interview and less restrictive than the standardized open-ended one. This allows “the interviewees to express their opinions and describe experiences in a more relaxed and spontaneous way. In-depth responses can be generated from the interview if the interviewer knows how to guide the conversation and probe for more details” Sewell (2006). To ensure that, I endeavored to equip myself with the necessary interviewing skills before the formal interviews were conducted. Meanwhile, I tried to keep in mind the possible drawbacks suggested by Sewell. They are intrusiveness and subjectiveness of the interviewer, and interpersonal dynamics between the interviewer and the interviewee.

### 3.6 Use of Metaphorical Responses

My intention in using metaphorical responses in this study is to clarify the meanings of the data gathered from the semi-structured interviews. As suggested by Beck and Murphy (1993), the use of metaphor can make clear the narratives of the informants by comparing them to concrete easily understood ones. The method I used was originally designed by Day and his colleagues (2000) for researching the educational management and leadership in schools in the United Kingdom.

The word metaphor comes from Greek *metapherein* (i.e. meta=beyond, pherein=to bring). It refers to the transference of the relation between one set of ideas or objects to another set for the purpose of brief explanation. Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 185) argue that truth is based on a subjective understanding and truth is always relative to a conceptual system. Any human conceptual system is mostly metaphorical in nature. As elaborated by Luborsky (1998: 327),

“Metaphors serve as orienting constructs that sustain a sense of wholeness. They do so by dissolving prior images or disparate elements to give fresh coherence to the multitude of events and periods of a lifetime. Guiding metaphors (e.g., nut-shell) cross-reference separate domains of meaning to supply information from a familiar to a lesser known domain, thus merging them to form a new one”.

In other words, a metaphor functions to link two usually unassociated ideas or objects and to highlight a similarity or similarities between them. Some theorists argue that metaphors may only create partial understanding whilst hiding other

aspects of the concepts. Koro-Ljungberg (2001: 372) argues that we as researchers cannot truly understand other people's thinking and fully capture the complexity of the language used, "but through metaphors we can build a bridge between their experiences and our own such that metaphors act as translators, which translate pieces of the information to another form". That means a metaphorical response can provide elaboration on the narratives to connect to the real-life experiences of the informants. However, when using this research tool, I have to keep in mind that a metaphor is not made sense of in isolation, but only in its discursive context (Cameron, 2003: 146). Therefore, I will carry out the interpretation processes in an interactive way with the data collected from the individual and group interviews. This is to make cross-references between the metaphors used and the narratives of the informants to see whether there are any consistencies or gaps.

### **3.7 Trustworthiness of the Study**

The question of validity, reliability and generalizability is always a concern to qualitative researchers. Reliability refers to “the extent to which a test produces similar results under constant conditions on all occasions” (Bell, 1987: 50); validity refers to “how correctly the research portrays the phenomenon it is supposed to portray” (Brock-Utne, 1996: 615); and generalizability refers to “the degree to which findings can be generalized to other settings similar to the one in which the study occurred.” (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998: 186) These concepts are employed as quality criteria by quantitative researchers, and are used as indicators of the confidence which can be placed in the research findings for representing the phenomenon in question. When the domain of social science is extended from the prediction of facts to the interpretation of meaning and the nature of knowledge is no longer the mere reflection of some objective reality, the criteria and forms of validation change (Kvale, 2002: 307). This argument implies that the concepts of validity, reliability and generalizability as positivist constructs cannot be easily applied to qualitative methods. More importantly, the meaning and salience of these complex terms should be varied according to the stance of qualitative research.

Regarding the issue of quality criteria, Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that the above-mentioned notions need to be grounded in the worldview of qualitative research. The basic assumption is that reality is constructed, multi-dimensional and ever-changing rather than a single, immutable reality waiting to be observed and

measured. They suggest the notion of trustworthiness for qualitative approaches. The alternative standards include the concepts of credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability (Guba and Lincoln, 1989). When there is no perfect truth or absolute reality, trustworthiness is an important objective for qualitative researchers to achieve by which they contribute to an acceptable level of authenticity to reflect the multi-dimensional and socially constructed reality.

Schwandt (2001: 258-259) (cited in Fok, 2005) explains clearly these four criteria in parallel with the corresponding concepts of quantitative research:

First, credibility (parallel to internal validity) addressed the issue of the inquirer providing assurances of the fit between respondents' views of their life ways and the inquirer's reconstruction and representation of same. Second, transferability (parallel to external validity) dealt with the issue of generalization in terms of case-to-case transfer. It concerned the inquirer's responsibility for providing readers with sufficient information on the case studied such that readers could establish the degree of similarity between the cases studied and the case to which findings might be transferred. Third, dependability (parallel to reliability) focused on the process of the inquiry and the inquirer's responsibility for ensuring that the process was logical, traceable, and documented. Finally, conformability (parallel to objectivity) was concerned with establishing the fact that the data and interpretations of an inquiry were not merely figments of the inquirer's imagination. It called for linking assertions, findings, and interpretations, and so on to the data themselves in readily discernible ways."

In the following, I explain what strategies that I have adopted to meet the quality criteria for qualitative research in this study.



Guba and Lincoln (1981), Merriam (1988) and Patton (2002) suggest that qualitative research can better ensure its credibility with five basic strategies: triangulation, member checks, peer examination, long-term observations, and researcher's biases. I explain each of these below:

Triangulation – refers to the combination of investigators, methods, and sources of data in a single study to determine the accuracy of emerging findings. It attempts to map out more fully, the richness of the phenomenon by studying it from more than one single method and one single source. In my study, I decided to use semi-structured individual and group interviews, documentary analysis and metaphorical responses to compare findings from these different methods and sources.

Member Checks – refers to the procedures of taking data collected from the informants, and the researcher's tentative interpretations of these data, sending back to the informants from whom they were derived, asking if the interpretations are plausible. In my study, I asked the informants to check the contents of transcripts and the themes generated from my interpretations. I anticipated this back-and-forth process would take a long period of time.

Peer Examination – refers to the process of involving peers or colleagues as critical friends to examine the data and to comment on the plausibility of the emerging findings. I invited two colleagues who obtained their Ph.D. to be my peer reviewers for cross-checking the plausibility of the data.

Long-term observations – refers to the practice of engaging in the research situation over a long enough period of time to ensure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon. In my study, though on-site observation has not been chosen as one of the data collection tools, I have an in-depth understanding of the local preschool contexts. As mentioned in Section 1.4, I have been involved in the field for over ten years. My observations and understanding of preschool leadership is multi-dimensional and multi-faceted.

Researcher's Biases – refers to the presentation of the background, experience and orientation of the researcher at the beginning of the study. This enables the readers to better understand how the data might have been interpreted in the manner they were. I have identified my understanding of preschool leadership in relation to my own biographical influences and theoretical preferences in the first chapter. This process is important for my personal biases and values to be exposed to external examination and also for my critical self-reflection.

Regarding the issue of transferability, I make reference to the online learning materials published by Colorado State University in the United States (2006). It is specifically pointed out that

“Transferability is most relevant to qualitative research methods such as ethnography and case studies. Reports based on these research methods are detailed and specific. However, because they often consider only one subject or one group, researchers who conduct such studies seldom generalize the results to other

populations. The detailed nature of the results, however, makes them ideal for transferability.”

In other words, generalizability is a limitation of case study research since transferability only allows for "temporary understanding" instead of applying research results to every situation that may occur in the future (Cziko, 1993: 10). However, the results of this type can be taken as a useful reference for the readers who are interested in the topic under review. To enhance the transferability of qualitative research, the researcher needs to supply a highly detailed description of the research situation and methods. To ensure that, I kept a detailed account of my research activities and provide the background information of the schools and the informants involved in this study that enables the reader to know about the original research situation in order to determine whether it is similar to their own.

As discussed earlier, dependability requires researchers to explain how changes in context produced changes in observations and confirmability refers to the degree to which research results can be confirmed by other researchers. To meet these quality criteria, I used a system of audit trail to enhance the dependability and confirmability of this study (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Morse, 1994). My account of the audit trail included the research questions, files of transcripts, written reports and records, data management and analysis methods, tables of basic and organizing themes and the thematic network developed. The records provide verification of the research activities in this study, thus adding to the trustworthiness of study conclusions.

## **Chapter 4     The Research Process**

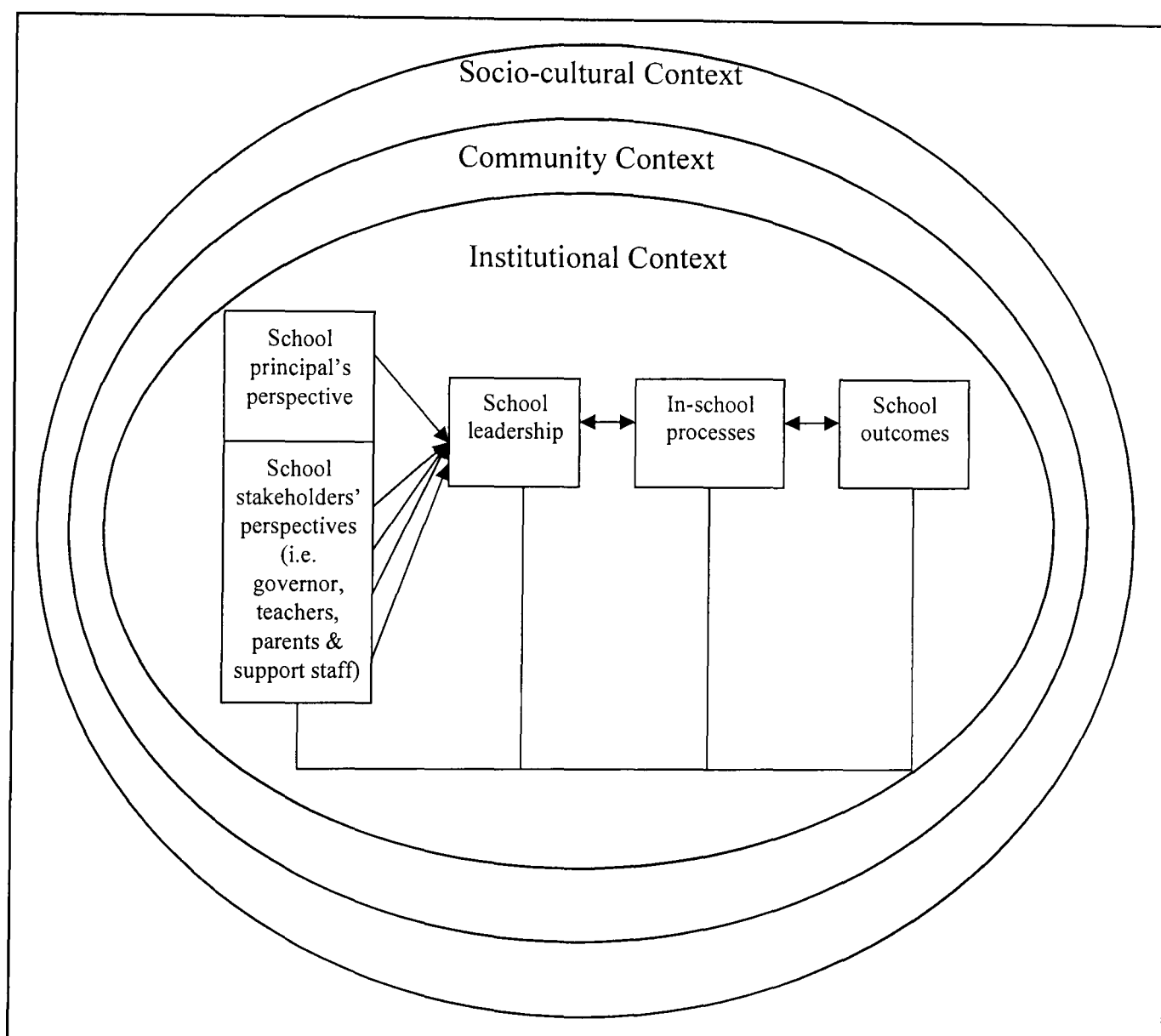
This chapter reports the research process of this study. It starts with an overview of the conceptual framework of the research design. It is followed by my discussion on the selection of the case study schools and informants, the choices of research instruments, data collection and data management. Subsequently, I will explain Attride-Stirling's thematic network and describe how I conducted the data analysis based on that model. The limitations and ethical considerations of this study will be discussed at the end of this chapter.

### **4.1     Conceptual Framework**

It is argued that a school principal's values, beliefs, and experiences are central to an understanding of how they exercise educational leadership (Barth, 1986; Leithwood, Begley and Cousins, 1992). Consistent with models for understanding the nature, causes and consequences of educational leadership (e.g. Bossert et al., 1982; Hallinger and Heck, 1996), Hallinger and Leithwood (1998: 133-134) argue that the principal's personal values and experiences are shaped by their interaction with different aspects of the educational programme. These two scholars construct a theoretical framework to investigate the interaction of school leadership, intra-organizational processes, school outcomes and school context. They find that the process, outcomes and contextual factors are strongly linked with school leadership.

The conceptual framework that I developed is based on Hallinger and Leithwood's model with a modification that allows the study of the multiple perspectives of various stakeholder groups on school leadership. Figure 1 is a visual representation of the conceptual framework. I explain the underlying assumptions of how I constructed the framework below:

**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of Multiple Perspectives on School Leadership**



Firestone and Louis (1999) argue that school principals play an important role in the administration and organization of the school. They are the key people who link up the internal and external environments. Therefore, they are usually regarded as the major actors in leadership. The local education reform initiated in 2000 has put forward policies of decentralization of school management. Recently, the diverse stakeholder groups have had more opportunities to participate in school decision-making. This will probably lead to a paradigm shift in school leadership from a centralized to a diffused, dispersed, and distributed form and pattern. In consideration of this, I placed the school principal and stakeholders at the core of the framework. Their perceptions and understandings of school leadership are the major sources shaping the leadership phenomenon, and its impacts on in-school processes and school outcomes.

Going back to the work of Getzels et al. (1968), administrative theorists have sought to develop comprehensive conceptualizations of educational leadership. Their models account for the importance of contextual factors impinging on the leader's thinking and behaviour. In my conceptual framework, there are three layers of context ranging from the institutional, through community to the socio-cultural level. I adopted a combination of the definitions of contexts developed by Bossert et al. (1982) and by Leithwood et al. (1992). Bossert and his colleagues give weight to the impact of the community and institutional context on educational leadership and Leithwood lays emphasis on the socio-cultural context.

As indicated in my conceptual framework, the inner layer is the institutional context. It refers to the formal structure, goals, rules, and regulations of the organization (Bossert et al., 1982). This component of context represents the institutional variation in terms of educational ideology, operation, size, formal structure, staffing, staff qualifications, curricular goals and tuition. The second layer is the community context. It refers to the characteristics of the school's external environment. These include the socioeconomic status of the parents and student population, geographical features, parental expectations, and level of community support for the school (Bossert et al., 1982). The third layer is the socio-cultural context. Schein (2004) provides a widely recognized definition of culture as

“...a pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems” (p. 17).

As noted by Leithwood et al. (1992), the increasing diversity of our societies and a general trend towards globalization has similarly highlighted society and culture as a relevant source of influence on school management. This layer refers to the socio-cultural variables in the context of the greater community, society and culture. The broader societal culture exerts an influence on school management beyond the influence exerted by a specific organization's culture (Gerstner and O'Day, 1994). The three layers of context are the potential sources of influence on school leadership. Comparatively, the institutional context has more direct and

immediate impact on school leadership than that of the community and socio-cultural contexts. Therefore, I mainly explored the multiple perspectives of different school stakeholders on leadership practice and its interplay with the in-school processes, school outcomes and institutional context. In other words, the boundary of this study was set within the school context and the issues related to the school's external environment were not the main focus of this study. Though I would not explore the school stakeholders' views about the impact of the community and socio-cultural factors on school leadership, the background information of the parents who were involved in the interviews and the preschool context in Hong Kong would be collected to serve as a reference when conducting the data analysis in Chapter Six and presenting the discussion in Chapter Seven.



## 4.2 Selection of Case Study Schools and Informants

The selection of cases was based on whether that particular school demonstrated success through an external validation exercise. Since local early childhood education is an emergent field, there has been relatively little research done on the evaluation of school and programme quality. In the past decade, only two territory-wide projects on this area were systematically conducted. One was developed by the World Organization for Early Childhood Education – Hong Kong National Committee (OMEP-Hong Kong), a local branch of an international organization; and the other was conducted by the Quality Assurance Inspectorate of the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB), a local educational authority. The former is *Criteria for High Quality Programmes of Early Childhood Education and Care in Hong Kong* developed in 1996; and the latter is *Performance Indicators* first published in 2000.

As mentioned in Section 2.2.3, *Performance Indicators* is a reference guide for kindergartens for doing self-evaluation and external evaluation. Including those in the pilot stage, a total of 120 kindergartens were inspected in 2000-2005 (EMB, 2006a). Only a few kindergartens were evaluated as ‘excellent’. The QAI summary reports were published on the web pages of EMB. The Quality Assurance Inspectorate conducted a pilot study of 20 child care centres in 2005. Only one centre was rated as excellent in that exercise. Since it was a pilot study, the EMB did not publish the reports and the results were for internal use only.

As mentioned in Chapter One, OMEP-Hong Kong had conducted a research study in which it examined how well structural measures and management-related measures predicted process quality of preschools in Hong Kong. The large-scale research covered 60 preschools which was representative in terms of location, sponsor, status, size and tuition fees. The samples included 50 kindergartens and 10 child care centres. Some of the programmes were evaluated as high quality.

I assumed that effective leadership was essential for programme quality. Based on this assumption, I selected those preschools which were externally evaluated as 'excellent' by the EMB and OMEP-Hong Kong. This decision is in line with the aims of this study, i.e. to investigate effective leadership by reference to multiple perspectives of school stakeholders as well as situational and intervening factors contributing to the leadership practice for the quality of early childhood programmes. Practically speaking, schools that were rated highly in both evaluations may not be easy to access. Moreover, the schools selected for the present study were expected to be involved intensively throughout the research processes, e.g. members of the schools would be spending time on attending in-depth interviews and doing the member checks for the transcripts. Therefore, as a fallback, the schools selected were highly rated by at least one of the evaluations.

After completing the research design, I explored the possibility and feasibility of the study with representatives from the EMB and the OMEP-Hong Kong. I successfully identified the potential case study schools with the help offered by the EMB. Then, I contacted one of the research investigators of OMEP-Hong Kong

who was a member of academic staff of the Hong Kong Institute of Education. Unfortunately, she told me that part of the research documentation and information had been lost since the project was conducted nine years ago. It was not possible to accurately identify the preschools for me. Under these circumstances, I could only select the case study schools based on the criteria developed by the EMB. With the assistance of the EMB, I could successfully gain access to one kindergarten and one child care centre. These schools had been rated as excellent in 2004 and 2005 respectively.

The informants in this study were purposefully sampled. In a qualitative approach, Patton (2002) suggests several sampling strategies. Criterion sampling and maximum variation sampling are two of those. In the first place, criterion sampling ensures that the stakeholders selected as informants have direct experience of being involved in the school operation at different levels. The stakeholders in this study are defined as the individuals with a vested interest in programme quality. With this consideration in mind, I decided to choose the school coordinators, principals, teachers, support staff and parents. The reason for not choosing young children as informants was because they tend to be more attentive to immediate interactions with their classroom teachers rather than to the operation of programmes at the school level.

The second sampling strategy adopted was to ensure that the samples would provide rich data in order to capture the leadership phenomena. This sampling strategy aims at describing the central themes that cut across a great deal of

variation. Its underlying logic is that “any common patterns that emerge from great variation are of particular interest and value in capturing the core experiences and central, shared dimensions of a setting or phenomenon” (Patton, 2002: 235). In this regard, I decided to choose one kindergarten and one child care centre. The reason was that the nature of preschool education had resulted in two separate systems of “education” and “care” evolving from different views on the provision of services. Kindergartens are registered with the Education and Manpower Bureau and are governed by the 1971 Education Ordinance and Regulations. Their curriculum is oriented toward academic preparation for primary education. Child Care Centres, on the other hand, are registered with the Social Welfare Department and are under the jurisdiction of 1975–76 Child Care Centres Ordinance. They provide custodial services for children whose parents are both working. Although the harmonization of education and care services recommended by the Education Commission had become part of the agenda for policy change since the 1980s, the work was just completed in August of 2006. The impact of this dual policy approach is still deeply rooted in the form and function of preschooling in Hong Kong.

In each case study school, I interviewed the coordinator (i.e. acting as school governor), principal, 1 senior teacher (if any), 1 class teacher of each cohort, 1 subject or special education teacher (if any) and half of the support staff. Two parent groups were selected for interviews. One was the parents whose children were in the class of 5-6 year-olds and the other was those parents whose children graduated in 2005. The children of these parents had been/were going through the

whole schooling process. These parents probably had a better understanding of the operation of the school and its recent changes. All the parents were invited by the school principals. The number of each parent group ranged from four to five, except the graduation class of School A. One parent of that group was absent from the interview for a personal reason. Accordingly, 11 interviews were conducted in each school and the total number of interviews in this study was 22. The composition of informants was listed in the table below:

**Table 2: Composition of Informants**

School A		
School Governor		1 person (selected)
Principal		1 person (selected)
Teachers	Class A (2-3 year-olds)	2 teachers (randomly selected 1)
	Class B (3-4 year-olds)	2 teachers (randomly selected 1)
	Class C (4-5 year-olds)	2 teachers (randomly selected 1)
	Class D (5-6 year-olds)	2 teachers (randomly selected 1)
	Special Education	1 teacher (selected)
Support staff	Housekeeper	4 workers (randomly selected 2)
Parents	Class A	1 group (not selected)
	Class B	1 group (not selected)
	Class C	1 group (not selected)
	Class D	1 group (selected 5 parents)
	Graduation Class	1 group (selected 3 parents)
Sub-total	11 interviews	
School B		
School Governor		1 person (selected)
Principal		1 person (selected)
Senior teacher		1 person (selected)
Teachers	Class A (3-4 year-olds)	4 teachers (randomly selected 1)
	Class B (4-5 year-olds)	4 teachers (randomly selected 1)
	Class C (5-6 year-olds)	3 teachers (randomly selected 1)
	Language Education	3 teachers (randomly selected 1)
Support staff	Clerk	1 person (selected)
	Housekeeper	3 workers (randomly selected 1)
Parents	Class A	1 group (not selected)
	Class B	1 group (not selected)
	Class C	1 group (selected 4 parents)
	Graduation Class	1 group (selected 5 parents)
Sub-total	11 interviews	

### **4.3 Pilot Study**

The purpose of pilot study was to develop the researcher's skills in administering the instruments and conducting the interviews. After completing the design of the interview guides and fact-finding questionnaires, I conducted a pilot study with two preschools. Through this exercise, I expected to see whether the research instruments were appropriate and feasible or not. Moreover, conducting the mock interviews was intended to sharpen my interviewing skills. The pilot study was held in a kindergarten and a child care centre. Both of them were operated by a non-profit making organization with a religious background.

In the pilot study, I sent the interview guides and the questionnaires to all staff of two schools. Then, I visited the schools and collected their opinions in person. They gave me substantial and useful feedback for modification or refinement to ensure the appropriateness of the content and wordings used for interviews. After that, I conducted 4 mock interviews with the kindergarten principal, 1 teacher, 1 member of support staff and a group of 2 parents. The purpose was to get feedback on the flow of the interviews and so that I could modify my technique on prompting, clarifying answers, and providing positive non-verbal feedback. Overall, the interviews were smooth except the one with the support staff. She was over fifty years old and had received primary education. She said that it was quite difficult to answer some questions such as the conceptions of the quality of the programme and school management because she was not familiar with those terms.

Therefore, I had to rephrase those questions in a more concrete way: “In your opinion, what are the important features of a good early childhood programme?”, and “What factors do you think contribute to a good programme?” After the pilot interviews, I refined the interview guides and prepared a list of prompts for the interviewees who might find the questions too general to answer.



## **4.4 Research Instruments**

I used a variety of research instruments to collect data in order to describe a richer picture of the research phenomenon in the case study schools. They included:

- Short fact-finding questionnaires
- Individual interviews
- Group interviews
- Metaphorical Response

### **4.4.1 Fact-finding Questionnaires**

I prepared five sets of questionnaires (Appendix 2) to obtain the basic personal information about the informants and the background of the school. The information included:

- School setting (i.e. name of school, school type, no. of enrolment, no. of teachers, qualifications of teachers, etc.)
- Informant's background (i.e. age range, level of educational attainment, professional qualification, years of field experience, length of service, post, etc.)
- Family background (i.e. no. of children attending the case study school, family income, etc.)

### **4.4.2 Individual Interviews**

As mentioned in Section 3.5, the form of the individual and group interviews in this study was semi-structured. An interview guide was developed to facilitate the interviews. It would help me as a researcher to ensure all important themes were addressed. It basically covers the areas of programme quality, the recent change of

school improvement and school leadership practice. The interview guides can be found in Appendix 3.

The interviews for the school governors, school principals, teachers and support staff were conducted on an individual basis. Since these school actors are working closely together on a daily basis, one-to-one interviews would be more appropriate so as to avoid the problems of micro-politics and to protect their confidentiality.

I sent the interview guides and the questionnaires to the case study schools a week before the interviews. This allowed the informants to have enough time to read through the guides and fill out the questionnaires. The two school principals were very helpful in scheduling the interviews for me.

The interviews were held in the case study schools. A special room was arranged for the interviews. The interviews were audio-taped and I took note of the process to capture some important viewpoints of the informants. This would allow me to facilitate the process of interview. After the interviews, I collected the completed questionnaires from the informants.

#### **4.4.3 Group Interviews**

The interviews for the parents were held in small groups of three to five people. Group interviewing was considered more feasible and appropriate for parents because it would provide an interactive process to generate richer data that might

not be available through individual interviews (Fontana and Frey, 2003: 80). This would enable me as a researcher to listen to the variety of voices of parents and the enthusiasm generated toward the subject matter (Madriz, 2003). Practically speaking, it is an effective way to gather a larger number of informants' views on a selected topic rather than through an individual interview. While adopting this approach, I was also aware that there were a number of limitations in relation to the epistemological implications. Some researchers differentiate between "public" and "private" voices (e.g. Stewart and Shamdasani, 1990). This reminded me to consider carefully the degree of authenticity of the voices that I heard in the data. The discussion among the informants could possibly lead to an implicit group dynamics that could impose certain constraints on the nature of data collected. It was a fact that there could be significant differences between data generated from group interviewing and other methods. However, as Wilson (1997: 221) argues, one data collection method is not necessarily more valid, or does not necessarily generate more authentic data, than the other. Nevertheless, I was still conscious that the data collected from the group interviews were based on a complex social network among the informants, and I also attempted to keep these complexities of the group dynamic in mind whilst analyzing the data.

#### **4.4.4 Metaphorical Response**

All the informants in individual interviews and those that participated in group interviews were invited at the end of discussion to identify a metaphor or metaphors to characterize their conceptions of effective leadership in preschools.

When using the tool of metaphorical response, I first explained the meaning of a metaphor to the informants. This was to enable them to understand what a metaphor was. Many informants could easily provide me the answers and elaborate the meanings of their metaphors, but some of them could hardly think of any. I gave an example to those who needed help. In spite of that, two members of support staff and five parents still could not give their answers. I thought they might find it too abstract and difficult to answer.

#### **4.5 Data Collection**

As mentioned in Section 1.4, I have been involved in the field for a long period of time. Therefore, it was inevitable that many of the informants - those I interviewed - might be the graduates or students of my University or those I had worked with in the field. In fact, some members of staff in both case study schools were my students and I had experienced a long working relationship with some of them. I might be positively biased towards their opinions on school leadership. Given the fact that it is impossible to eliminate the researcher's bias in social research, I adopted two strategies to try to mitigate the risk of contaminating the final report. One strategy is to be more self-conscious towards the responses of the informants that I knew before. The second is to invite my peer reviewers to provide feedback during the research process (Walcott, 1999) (see Section 3.7). The discussion on the issue of researcher's bias will be further elaborated in Section 4.8.

I visited the two school principals to explain the aims and purpose of my study. The school principals agreed to participate in the study with the approval of their school coordinators. Before commencing with the data collection, I visited the case study schools again and gave a briefing to all staff of each school. I introduced them my background and explained the aims and purpose of the study, the procedures of data collection, the use of research findings and the fact that the views of respondents would be treated confidentially.

Qualitative interviewing was the major source of data collection in this study. The informants were interviewed for one session, ranging from 60 to 90 minutes. The majority of the interviews were completed within the aforementioned duration. Only the interviews with the school governors and principals were longer, around 160 minutes, while the interviews with the members of support staff were quite short, around 30 to 50 minutes. The language medium used was Cantonese which is the predominant dialect used in Hong Kong society.

Due to the flexible nature of the qualitative research, the research design inevitably needed to be adjusted from time to time causing difficulties in giving the informants a full picture of the study at the beginning of the process. Bartunek and Louis (1996) emphasize the importance of repeatedly ensuring the informed consent of the participants throughout the research process. This causes me to think of the need to obtain the revised view of informed consent from the informants at different points in the research process. In the beginning of each interview, I briefly explained to the informant again the aims and purpose of the study, the protection of confidentiality and the rights of the interviewee. This was to provide them with an opportunity to voice their individual concerns and to ensure that they had the right to stop or even withdraw from the interview. When the informants gave their approval, I asked them to sign a consent form (Appendix 1). Consent for audio-taping the interview was also sought before the formal interview started.

I started off with rapport building by focusing on more concrete or factual information. For example, I asked the informants to describe their personal and professional background and their roles and responsibilities in school. I thought this ice-breaking strategy could probably help building up rapport. After that, I carried on exploring their perspectives on effective leadership. I encouraged the informants to express their views by nodding my head and smiling. I sometimes paraphrased what the informants said. This was to give them a signal that I was actively listening to them. I added in prompts to help informants further explain their views and I also gave cues to clarify some points when necessary. I was conscious of those parents who were too dominant in the dialogue. I tried to give the less vocal parents equal opportunities to share their views and experiences. Generally, I covered the topics in a flexible manner to allow the informants to express their opinions and feelings as much as possible. At the end of each interview, I asked the informant to fill in the fact-finding questionnaire and expressed my vote of thanks.

## 4.6 Data Management

### 4.6.1 Audit Trail

In order to help manage my data, I prepared a detailed data collection and analysis timetable:

**Table 3: Timetable of Data Collection and Analysis**

2005	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Briefing & training for helpers							→					
Pilot study							→					
Data collection								→				
Preparing interview transcripts									→			
Writing case summary reports										→		
2006	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Preparing interview transcripts	→											
Writing case summary reports	→											
Data coding		→										
Conducting member checks				→								



#### **4.6.2 Interview Transcripts**

Two helpers were employed to help me do the transcription work. To ensure the quality of the transcriptions, I provided training for them and used the data gathered from the pilot study for doing a dry run. Since the helpers did not have a background or involvement in the field, they were not familiar with some jargon used by the informants. When they did the transcription work, I maintained close communication with them to provide clarification and further information if necessary. To ensure the accuracy of the transcripts, the two helpers cross-checked one another's work and I did a final check. The transcriptions were done in Cantonese. Only those extracts used in the dissertation were translated into English.

After the completion of final checking of the interview transcripts, I began to do the data coding by using the computer software, NVivo. To ensure the plausibility of my interpretations, I sent the coded transcripts to the informants for member checks. Since it was a back-and-forth process, I decided to select one case study school at a time just in case many of the informants in that school did not agree with my interpretations. Once I was satisfied, I then proceeded to do the member checks with the other school.

#### **4.6.3 Fact-finding Questionnaires**

At the end of each interview, I collected the fact-finding questionnaire from the informant. I prepared spare copies for those who forgot to bring them to the interviews. Since the questionnaire was rather short and simple, most of the informants could complete it by themselves. Only one member of support staff and one parent required my assistance and further explanation on the questions. After collecting the questionnaires, I kept the data in individual files. This information would be useful for me to understand the personal and professional background of the informants.

#### **4.6.4 Case Summary Reports**

The interviews were transcribed verbatim. Once this was complete, I started writing the summary report of each interview (A sample can be found in Appendix 4). The process enabled me to get a holistic understanding of the data before I applied codes to the text to dissect it into segments. I noted down the background of each informant, his/her job history and responsibility/involvement in school, his/her views on early childhood education and programme quality, management and leadership of the school, conceptions on effective leadership and the metaphor used to describe school leadership. In the last part of the report, I recorded my own reflections on each interview. This would provide me with insights when doing the data analysis.

#### **4.6.5 Other Written Records**

I had kept various written records and documents throughout the research process. The school principals sent me the school documents including the school's mission statement, information pamphlet, timetables, and newsletters. As mentioned in Section 3.7, I attempted to use documentary analysis to compare the data collected from the interviews. However, those documents only provided me with some supplementary information concerning the school background and history but could not serve to validate and expand the verbal data provided by the informants. This limitation will be further discussed in Section 4.8.

Besides, in each interview, I jotted down fieldnotes which helped me keep track of the important views expressed by the informants and allowed me to facilitate the flow of interviews. I also wrote memos afterward including my observations and points of enquiry on what I had heard. As Charmaz (2002) argues, it was an initial but important step to data analysis.

## **4.7 Data Analysis**

The nature of this study is to understand the conceptualizations of leadership of different school stakeholders in the local preschool contexts. In view of the lack of theoretical concepts and empirical data on this area, my study is more for theory-building rather than theory-testing as mentioned in Section 3.2. Therefore, I decided to employ an inductive approach towards data analysis. In the following, I will explain the model of qualitative analysis developed by Attride-Stirling (2001). This was the model that I used in the process of data analysis, and it has previously been referred to by Fok (2005) who conducted research into the learning experiences of older adults in Hong Kong. Her work is a useful illustration of how to conduct qualitative data analysis by using Attride-Stirling's model.

### **4.7.1 Attride-Stirling's Thematic Network**

Qualitative methods have been gaining popularity in the past few decades throughout the social sciences (e.g. Bryman and Burgess, 1994; Denzin, 1994). However, Attride-Stirling (2001: 385) pinpoints the fact that there is a lack of tools available for qualitative data analysis. To address this gap, she developed thematic network analysis, a step-by-step guide to the analytical process for qualitative research. The thematic method systematically depicts the procedures of how to analyze the textual materials. It is useful to yield theoretical constructions and interpretations of social phenomena grounded in the qualitative data. I decided to

use Attride-Stirling's model to build up my thematic network, while at the same time making reference to Strauss and Corbin's methods for data coding (Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

The thematic method is classified into three stages including six basic steps (Attride-Stirling, 2001: 391)

**Table 4: Analysis Stages of Attride-Stirling's Thematic Network**

<b>Analysis Stage A: Reduction and breakdown of text</b>	
Step 1	Coding the material
	a) Devise a coding framework
	b) Dissect text using the coding framework
Step 2	Identify themes
	a) Abstract themes from coded text segments
	b) Refine themes
Step 3	Construct thematic networks
	a) Arrange themes
	b) Select basic themes
	c) Rearrange into organizing themes
	d) Deduce global theme(s)
	e) Illustrate as thematic network (s)
	f) Verify and refine the network(s)
<b>Analysis Stage B: Exploration of text</b>	
Step 4	Describe and explore thematic networks
	a) Describe the network
	b) Explore the network
Step 5	Summarize thematic networks
<b>Analysis Stage C: Integration of exploration</b>	
Step 6	Interpret patterns

#### **4.7.2 Reduction and Breakdown of Text**

In the process of data analysis, I followed Attride-Stirling's model to code the materials and identify themes. I devised the coding framework based on the theoretical construction guiding the research questions. For example, "continuous professional development", "support from outside expert", "use of external resources", and "capacity building" were the common parameters in the strategies used in school improvement. Meanwhile, I maintained some flexibility in devising the coding framework in order to incorporate the salient and recurrent issues arising in the text itself. For example, I found that "collaboration among sibling schools" and "overseas visit" were frequently mentioned by the informants when talking about the process of school improvement. The way I preceded was quite similar to Strauss and Corbin's (1998) open coding which referred to the process of breaking down, comparing, and categorizing data. The process was both theoretically driven and data driven.

As mentioned earlier, I used NVivo to do the data coding. To ensure the process was completed with great rigor, I tried to make sure the codes should have quite explicit boundaries. As noted by Attride-Stirling, the codes used in the thematic analysis are not interchangeable or redundant and they should also be limited in scope. However, I sometimes used more than one category to code the same phrase or paragraph. For example, "teamwork" and "communication with parents" were used to code the same paragraph, as the incident mentioned relating to two teachers helping each other to communicate with a parent who had an enquiry on

her child's learning. In other words, the exact same unit of data was placed into more than one category. After the initial coding, I read through the transcripts again in order to carefully compare and contrast each unit of coding. Gradually, I built up a coding scheme.

I reduced the data into more manageable sets of significant themes that could conceptually represent the text. This required a great deal of interpretative work. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998: 12), the process of theory-building means

“Theory that is derived from data, systematically gathered and analyzed throughout the research process. In this method, data collection, analysis, and eventual theory stand in a close relationship to one another. A researcher does not begin with a project with a preconceived theory in mind. Rather, the researcher begins with an area of study and allows the theory to emerge from the data”.

I used my insights and theoretical sensitivity to interpret the findings in order to generate an understanding of the data of this study. It was inevitable that my prior knowledge of the subject matter and my field experience would affect the process of interpretations.

I used the research questions to guide the construction of a thematic network. The table of basic, organizing and global themes can be found in Section 4.7.4. I took themes derived from the text to assemble them into groups in terms of similarity and coherence. For example, I assembled the categories, “support to children with individual needs”, “support to children with family problems”, and “support to families” into a group. I renamed the original sets of categories as “support to

children and families” to render a higher level of conceptualization. I identified the issues shared among the basic themes, “support to children and families”, “programme features”, “staff-child relationship”, and “communication with parents” and then clustered them to make an organizing theme, “quality programme”. Once the basic themes, organizing themes and global themes were prepared, I proceeded to see if there were any connections between the themes and to produce a thematic network. I went back to text segments related to basic themes to ensure that the global themes, organizing themes and basic themes were reflected in the data.

#### **4.7.3 Exploration of Thematic Network**

It was important to make the voices of each stakeholder group explicit. I took each category and network in turn and described its content with text segments. When doing the description, I explored and noted down the underlying patterns. The issues discussed by the informants were fitted into a matrix that was developed inductively from the data. This enabled me to summarize the global themes that emerged in the description of the network in a systemic manner. I summarized 66 tables of categories in total which was the basic information for constructing the thematic network in the later stage. To enable my readers to gain a better understanding of what I had compiled, the table of category “allocation of duties” is sampled in Appendix 5 for illustration.



#### 4.7.4 Integration of Exploration

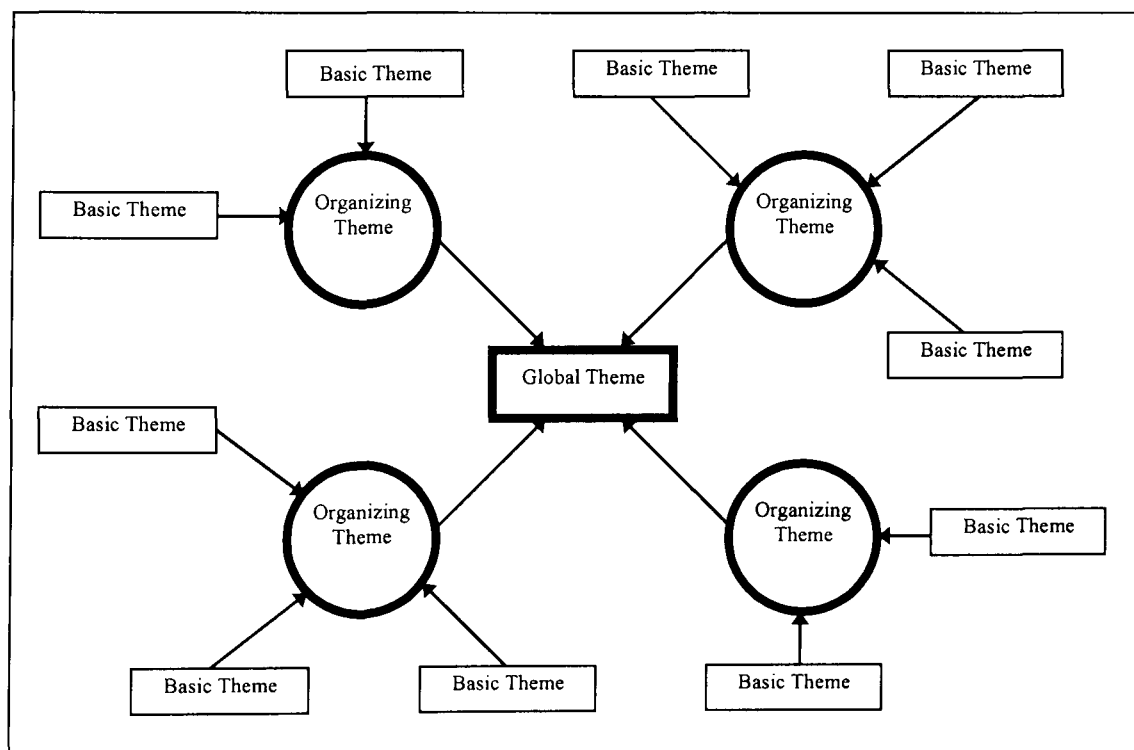
The last step was to return to the original research questions underpinning the thematic networks and address these with arguments grounded in the exploration of texts. The thematic network consisted of a systematic extraction of themes at different levels.

According to Attride-Stirling (2001: 388-389), the definitions of each level of theme are:

- lower-order premises evident in the text (Basic Themes);
- categories of basic themes grouped together to summarize more abstract principles (Organizing Themes); and
- super-ordinate themes encapsulating the principal metaphors in the text as a whole (Global Themes).

The organization of the various levels of themes and network is shown in the figure below:

**Figure 2: Attride-Stirling's Thematic Network**



In the process of identifying the basic, organizing and global themes, I read through the tables and regrouped them based on the similarities in meaning they shared. Then, I brought together these deductions and my research themes to explore the significant concepts, patterns and structures. I finally got 66 categories, 21 basic themes and 6 organizing themes presented in the table below:

**Table 5: Development of Organizing Themes**

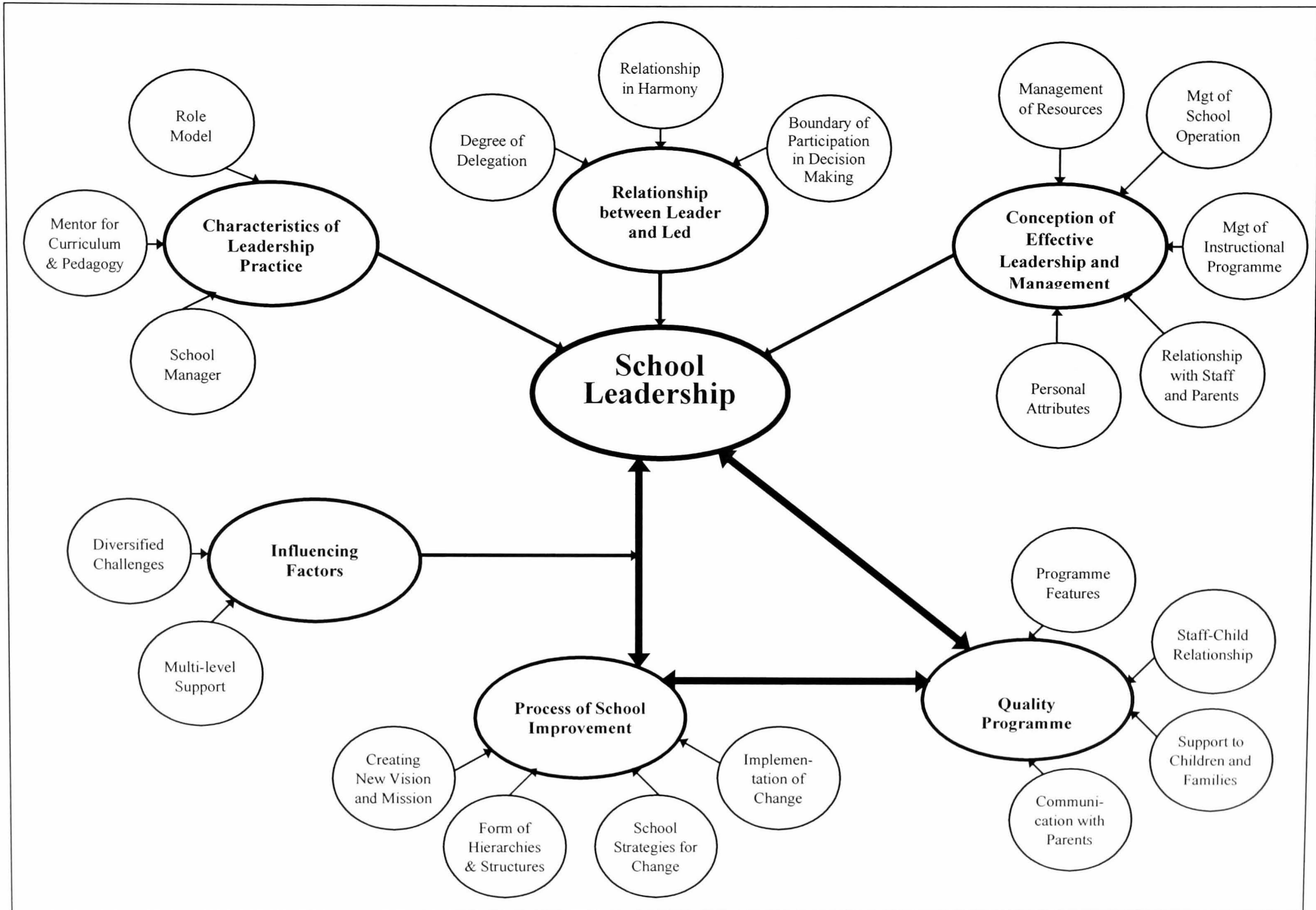
Organizing themes	Basic themes	Categories
Quality Programme	Programme features	Comprehensiveness of programme
		Learning motivation and attitudes
		Mode of learning and its effectiveness
	Staff-Child relationship	Caring for children
		Teacher's attitudes
	Support to children and families	Support to children with individual needs
		Support to children with family problems
		Support to families
	Communication with parents	Communication with parents
Influencing Factors	Diversified challenges	Government policy
		Pressure from interfacing with primary education
		Keen competition among preschools
		Increased demands for accountability
		Diversity of parents' demands and expectations
		Psychical constraint
	Multilevel supports	Government policy
		Organizational support
		Support from school governor
		Collaboration among sibling schools
		Teachers' mutual support
		Support from parents

Process of School Improvement	Creating new vision and mission	Vision building
		Professional value and belief
		School governor's involvement
	Form of hierarchies and structures	Form of hierarchies and structures
	School strategies for change	Collaboration among sibling schools
		Continuous professional development
		Support from outside experts
		Use of external resources
		Overseas visit
		Capacity building
	Implementation of change	Communication with school governor
		Communication with parents
		Process of change
		Staff collaboration
		Teamwork
		Workload
Conceptions of Effective Leadership and Management	Management of resources	Management of resources
	Management of school operation	Giving guidance on daily operation
		Allocation of duties
		Staff discipline
	Management of instructional programme	Providing clear direction
		Managing the implementation of curriculum
	Relationship with staff and parents	Relationship with staff and parents
	Personal attributes	Personal attributes
Characteristics of Leadership Practice	Role model	Professional value and belief
		Personal attributes
	Mentor for curriculum and pedagogy	Providing clear direction

		Managing the process of curriculum implementation
	School manager	Management of resources
		Giving guidance on daily operation
		Relationship with staff and parents
		Staff discipline
		Staff supervision
		Staff collaboration
		Teamwork
		Allocation of duties
		Workload
Relationship between the Leader and the Led	Degree of delegation	Delegation of responsibility
		Role-sharing
		Giving autonomy
		Conformity to authority
	Boundary of participation in decision-making	Staff participation in decision-making
		Parent participation in decision-making
	Relationship in harmony	Social relationship
		Working relationship

I used the conceptual framework of this study (see Section 4.1) to guide the construction of the thematic network. I found that the multiplicity of school leadership (i.e. Global Theme) could best be understood in relation to how it related to in-school processes, school outcomes and contextual factors (see Section 5.1). The thematic network below illustrates the relationships among the themes. I will discuss these themes and their relationships in detail in Chapter Six.

**Figure 3: Thematic Network**



#### **4.8 Limitations and Ethical Considerations in the Study**

Ethical issues related to educational research are very important, particularly as the nature of the qualitative methodological approach adds its own complexity. In this section, I give serious consideration of the ethical issues involved throughout the research process.

There are several limitations to the research methods used in this study. Theoretically speaking, qualitative interviewing is a mutual and interactive process. The roles of interviewer and interviewee ought to be egalitarian in nature (Kvale, 1996: 320). I was highly sensitive to the authority and power that I hold in my capacity as a university lecturer. I might have an influence over the interviewees, particularly the front-line teachers. This could possibly lead to an imbalance in power between the two parties. In the process of the interviews, I tried to keep in mind that I had to be very careful of the way I expressed myself because this might influence the responses of the interviewees.

With the permission of the school principals, I could randomly select the staff members to join the interviews. Although the teachers and support staff were selected by me, they might have felt reluctant and embarrassed to speak negatively about their schools. Since the parents were selected and invited by the school principals, they might come to the interviews simply because they did not want to turn down the invitation. Alternatively, these parents selected might be those who were highly satisfied with the educational service provided by the school. These

factors might have an influence on the neutrality of their opinions on the school leadership practice and programme quality.

It is not common that people would willingly express their opinions and talk about their personal experiences in public documents with their names and identity disclosed. Therefore, confidentiality is a vital requirement for credible research. Mere anonymity is insufficient for confidentiality to be safeguarded (Berg, 1998: 48-50). The informants of this study were the staff members and parents from the same school. Confidentiality was an issue which I had to think through when using face-to-face interviews, particularly those conducted in groups (Krueger, 1988). The informants certainly knew each other quite well. It is easy to map out the entire story and identify a particular informant by bits and pieces of information. I understood that it would be very difficult to maintain the confidentiality of the interviews. I did my best to provide protection by changing the facts where necessary as long as these changes did not distort the essential elements of this report.

As discussed in Section 3.7, there are several quality criteria for a qualitative research. I explain my strategies adopted in this study for ensuring the trustworthiness of my research as follows:

My original plan was to use a combination of interviews and documentary analysis for the triangulation of sources of data. The methods attempted to map out more fully the complexity of leadership phenomenon by studying it from more than one

single method and one single source. In fact, the schools could only provide me with their school's mission statement, programme pamphlets, timetables and newsletters. I was unable to access the school reports, internal circulars, records and minutes. Since the school documents might be intentionally selected by the school principals, I as a researcher should not accept them uncritically (Burgess, 1991: 124). The data provided by these documents allowed me to gain some understanding of the school contexts but could not serve to validate and expand the verbal data provided by the informants. This was a limitation in the triangulation of sources of data in this study. Under these circumstances, I listened carefully to the responses given by each informant and made cross-references among these responses to see whether there were any internal inconsistencies and gaps in what I had been told.

To obtain the member checks, I sent back the coded interview transcripts to the informants for their comments. If there was significant disagreement with the result, I contacted the informants again for further clarification. Generally speaking, the informants agreed to my interpretations. From this I understood that either the informants did not want to challenge my judgements, or I was able to maintain sufficient neutrality.

Since I worked alone on this study, I had no co-investigator to do the peer examination. Therefore, I sought views from experts to ensure the plausibility of this study. I asked my two colleagues to be peer reviewers. Both of them have Ph.D. degrees. One was in the field of rehabilitation having experience in working



with the families of children with special needs and the other was in the field of family violence and child abuse. Though they might not be familiar with preschool leadership and management issues, their substantial experience in conducting research was most helpful in giving me advice on qualitative analysis. I invited them to give comments on my coding scheme and the interpretations of textual analysis. They gave me valuable comments and they agreed that my analysis was reasonable and plausible. The process of sharing with them my work expanded and extended my perspective and understanding of the subject matter to a higher level of thinking.

## **Chapter 5      Background of Case Study Schools and Informants**

In this chapter, I will give an introduction to the background of the two case study schools and the informants, which will provide a context for understanding the views of stakeholders on school management and leadership. Firstly, a general picture of the contexts of the two schools will be given. Then, I will describe the profiles of the stakeholders in those schools. In order to protect their confidentiality, the descriptions of stakeholders will be made on the basis of their positions, not on their personal characteristics or identity. At the end of each subsection, I will also make a summary to emphasize the salience of specific aspects of the information provided by informants and will explain how it links with the research questions of this study in Chapter One and the discussion in Chapter Six.

### **5.1      Contexts of the Case Study Schools**

As discussed in the conceptual framework of this study in Chapter Four (see Figure 1), the factors of institutional context have direct and immediate impact on school leadership. In the following, I will highlight the characteristics of the two case study schools, including the school history, mission, nature of service, structure, size and staffing. These contextual factors are considered to be significant in influencing the leadership process and practice and programme quality.

### **5.1.1 School A**

School A was one of the preschools of Organization A. The organization was founded in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was a non-profit making organization. Its main objective was to care for the young and help those in need. It provided welfare, educational, cultural and recreational services.

Organization A was overseen by a Board of Directors. There was a Principal Social Services Secretary who was responsible for the social services including the preschool services. The preschool services were overseen by a co-ordinator who was serving as a school governor and responsible for the overall development and management of the services.

At the time of the study, Organization A was running over 15 preschools for the local community. School A was established in the mid 80s and was located in a social community building. The premises were purposefully built for educational and social services. The school provided half and full day programmes for children aged between 2 and 6. It also offered integrated programme to children with special needs. The school had 7 children with special needs registered when the study was undertaken. They had different types of needs including slow learning, mental delay, physical handicap and autism.

School A had 14 staff in total including the school principal, 9 teachers and 4 housekeepers. The number of students enrolled was 100. The nature of the school was non-profit making. Basically, most of the revenue generated from the school

fee would be spent on the meal, the purchase of equipment, staff salaries and staff training.

School A had a stable team of teaching staff. There was no turnover except one teacher who was internally transferred to a sibling school. Then, a new teacher was recruited as a replacement. The school structure was simple. It had three posts, namely school principal, teacher and housekeeper. Although there was no administrative or clerical staff, the school created a functional post called “on-duty teacher”. This teacher would provide administrative support to the school principal and assist the class teachers when necessary. In addition, the “on-duty teacher” was the relief for teachers who were on leave or absent from class for external training. Teachers had to take up the post by rotation on an annual basis.

In recent years, School A had applied for government educational funding with the support of the school governor. The school had a three-year development plan for curriculum improvement. The first year focused on the curriculum review; the second year focused on improving language education; and the third year on early science and arts education.

### **5.1.2 School B**

School B was one of the preschools of Organization B. The organization was founded by an American religious organization. It also operated a small number of preschools over the previous two decades. The total number of preschools was less

than 5. Organization B only provided preschool services and had no involvement in other public or social services.

Organization B was overseen by a School Board. Generally, the board did not directly involve itself in the management and operation of the schools, except for the annual financial budgeting. The preschool services was overseen by a coordinator who was serving as a school governor. The coordinator reported directly to the School Board, and was responsible for the development and management of all preschools of the organization.

School B had a history of 30 years and was located in a private housing estate. The premises were not specifically designed for educational use. The school had no outdoor playground. It offered half and full day programmes for children aged from 3 to 6. It did not offer integrated programme to children with special needs.

School B had 20 staff in total including the school principal, 1 senior teacher, 11 teachers, 3 English teachers, 1 clerk and 3 housekeepers. The number of students enrolled was 250. The nature of the school was non-profit making. In other words, most of the revenue generated from the school fee was spent on the educational provision for the children.

The school had a stable team of teaching staff. The turnover rate was very low. One teacher was recruited for the new school term. The school structure was quite simple. The principal of School B was responsible for the overall management and operation of the school. The senior teacher provided Principal B with assistance on

curriculum coordination and support on administrative and operational matters. The senior teacher was also responsible for co-ordinating the housekeepers.

## **Summary**

As mentioned in Section 2.4.4, preschools in Hong Kong are heterogeneous in terms of background, educational ideology, operation, size, staffing, staff qualifications, and the needs of their clientele. The local preschools have a variety of sponsors including religious organizations, voluntary agencies and profit-making organizations. Both schools in this study were run by non-profit organizations: one was a social service agency and the other was a religious organization. They were operated together with a number of sibling schools by their own parent organization and were overseen by an experienced coordinator who was serving as a school governor. The two schools had flexibility in their use of financial and manpower resources, support from the school governors and collaboration among the sibling schools. How do these distinctive features influence leadership practice in the quality process? The answer to this question will be provided in Section 6.2.

## **5.2 Profiles of the Informants**

In this section, I will give an account of the informants based on the positions they held in the schools. I will describe the similarities and pinpoint the differences between the two cases. This will make it possible to see the commonalities and distinctions of the informants. For the teaching staff, I will portray their characteristics on the dimensions of age, field experience, length of service and professional qualifications. For the parent groups, I will describe their level of educational attainment, occupation, family income, number of children attending the programme and involvement in voluntary work. Both professional and personal background of these various stakeholder groups are important points of reference to outline how they perceive school leadership in relation to programme quality.

### **5.2.1 School Governors**

Governor A and Governor B had been working in the field of early childhood education for over 20 years. Governor A was in her late forties while Governor B had reached retirement age. Both of them had substantial experience of working as front-line teachers and school principals. Governor A was promoted to the position and had occupied it for more than 6 years, while Governor B had occupied her position for more than 10 years.

Both of the school governors had received professional training. Governor A had obtained a bachelor degree in early childhood education and would attend the Master of Education programme in the near future. Governor B only received diploma training in mainland China 20 years ago. Comparatively, Governor A had much higher professional qualifications than Governor B.

The two school governors had long-term working relationships with the school principals. Governor A and Governor B had worked with their own school principal for 7 and 25 years respectively.

### **Summary**

Both of the school governors had substantial field experience of working as front-line teachers and school principals and had long-term, close relationships with their school principal. They played an active role in school development. It would be interesting to see how the two school governors influenced the leadership practice and the quality process in the case study schools. In addition, one of them had higher professional qualifications than the other. What are the similarities and differences between them when they provide direction and employ strategies in the process of school improvement? These two questions will be addressed in Section 6.2.



### **5.2.2 School Principals**

Principal A and Principal B had been working in the field of early childhood education for over 10 and over 20 years respectively. Principal A was in their mid thirties and Principal B was in their mid forties. Both of them had experience of working as a front-line teacher. Principal A was promoted to the position and had occupied it for more than 6 years, and Principal B had occupied for the position for more than 11 years. According to Katz (1995), there are four stages of professional development: survival (0-2 years of teaching), consolidation (2-3 years), renewal (3-4 years) and maturity (4-5 years or above). Both school principals had more than 5 years of experience in headship. Theoretically speaking, they were both mature in terms of professional competences, though there was a difference in the number of years.

Both of the school principals had received training at degree level which was higher than the registration requirement. In addition, Principal B was attending the Master of Education programme.

Before taking up the headship, both of the school principals were front-line teachers. At that time, they were under the immediate supervision of the school governors. Both of them had long-term working relationships with the school governors. They worked closely with their own governor in the process of school improvement and sometimes in relation to the daily operation of their schools.

## **Summary**

Both of the school principals had substantial experience of working as front-line teachers and had received training at degree level which was higher than the requirement for professional registration. How do these two school principals with such professional background and training exercise their leadership practice in the process of management? Is it in a centralized, decentralized or other leadership style? Moreover, how do they perceive the relationships between themselves and the school stakeholders and the characteristics of effective leadership? I will pay special attention to the first two questions when I analyse the data in Section 6.3 and address the last one in Sections 6.4 and 6.5.

### 5.2.3 School Teachers

I briefly describe the profiles of teaching staff of the two case study schools. That will be followed by a detailed account of the teachers that I interviewed.

#### Profiles of Teaching Teams

##### - Age Range

	Age Below 25	26-30	31-40	41-50	Above 50
School A	3	4	0	2	0
School B	0	9	5	1	0

School A had 9 teachers including 1 special education teacher while School B had 15 teachers including 1 senior teacher and 4 English teachers. The ages of the teachers in School A ranged from below 25 to 50. Specifically, 3 of them were below 25 and 2 teachers were in the age range 41-50. By comparison, most of the teachers in School B were between 26 and 40. Only 1 teacher was between 41 and 50.

##### - Years of Field Experience

	Less than 1 year	1-5 years	6-10 years	More than 10 years
School A	1	2	3	3
School B	1	3	4	7

Both schools had a teacher who had less than 1 year of field experience. These two teachers were newly recruited for the school term. 2 teachers of School A and 3 teachers of School B had experience in the range of 1 to 5 years. Actually, these teachers had at least 3 years of experience. Apart from the two new teachers, the teaching teams of the two schools had substantial field experience.

- **Length of Service**

	Less than 1 year	1-5 years	6-10 years	11-15 years	15-20 years
School A	1	7	1	0	0
School B	1	4	4	4	2

School A had over 20 years of history while School B had 30 years. In fact, except for the newly recruited teacher, all teachers in School A had been serving at least 3 years. The same was true for School B. This reflected that the teaching teams were stable. On the other hand, these teachers had experienced changes in school development in recent years.

- **Professional Qualifications**

	Certificate level	Higher Diploma level	Degree level
School A	5 (Remarks: 4 out of 5 teachers who obtained the certificate were attending the higher diploma programme.)	4	0

School B	13 (Remarks: 5 out of 12 teachers who obtained the certificate were attending the higher diploma programme.)	2 (Remarks: 1 out of 2 teachers who obtained the higher diploma was attending the degree programme.)	0
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As mentioned in Section 2.4.3, the professional entry requirement for preschool teachers was a one-year full-time certificate. Comparatively speaking, the teachers of School A had higher professional qualification than School B. Nearly half of the teachers in School A held a higher diploma. This teaching qualification was higher than the registration requirement. In contrast with this, 86% or 13 teachers of School B only held a certificate and 14% or 2 teachers were higher diploma holders. In addition, the patterns of continuous professional development of the two groups were quite different. In School A, 4 out of 5 teachers in the group of certificate level were receiving advanced training while only 5 out of 12 teachers in School B were.

### **Profiles of Teaching Staff Participating in Interviews**

For School A, 5 teachers were randomly selected including 4 who were the class teachers of each cohort and the special education teacher. For School B, 5 teachers were also randomly selected including 3 who were the class teachers, the senior teacher and 1 English teacher.

- **Age Range**

	Age Below 25	26-30	31-40	41-50	Above 50
School A	2	1	0	2	0
School B	0	3	2	0	0

According to Levinson (1986), a person's life cycle is chronologically composed of pre-, early, middle and late adulthood, with three transition periods between these four stages. For School A, the teachers that I interviewed were in the age range from below 25 to 50. Two teachers were in early adult transition, 1 in early adulthood and 2 in midlife transition to middle adulthood. In other words, some of them were starting their career and some might start thinking about their retirement plans. For School B, they were in the age groups of either 26 to 30 or 31 to 40. These teachers were in early adulthood.

- **Years of Field Experience**

	Less than 1 year	1-5 years	6-10 years	More than 10 years
School A	0	2	1	2
School B	0	3	0	2

As mentioned in the previous section, the teaching staff of both schools had substantial teaching experience. 2 teachers of School A and 3 teachers of School B were in the range of 1 to 5 years. Actually, these teachers had at least 3 years of

experience. They were in the “renewal” stage of professional development and the rest of them were in the “maturity” stage.

- **Length of Service**

	Less than 1 year	1-5 years	6-10 years	11-15 years	15-20 years
School A	0	4	1	0	0
School B	0	3	0	1	1

As also mentioned above, apart from one newly recruited teacher of each school, all teachers had been serving at least 3 years. In particular, 1 teacher of School B, who had been working for nearly 20 years, had witnessed the founding and different stages of development of the school.

- **Professional Qualifications**

	Certificate level	Higher Diploma level	Degree level
School A	4 (Remarks: all of them were attending the higher diploma programme.)	1	0
School B	4 (Remarks: 1 out of 4 teachers was attending the higher diploma programme.)	1 (Remarks: The teacher was attending the degree programme.)	0

For School A, the 4 teachers that I interviewed had a professional certificate and 1 teacher had a higher diploma. The case was same for School B. However, regarding continuous professional development, the two groups of teachers were quite different. 4 teachers of School A, who had certificate, were attending the higher diploma programme while only 1 teacher of School B did the same thing. 1 other teacher in School B was attending the degree programme.

### **Summary**

Both schools had a stable team of teaching staff who had been serving at least three years. Those teachers had completed the one-year of full-time training and had substantial teaching experience, and can be described as mature in terms of professional competence. Some of them were attending advanced training at higher diploma level and one of them at degree level. The school principals had relatively higher qualifications than their teaching staff. The profiles of professional training of the two schools were similar to the patterns that I described in Section 2.4.3, in that the overall qualifications of preschool practitioners in the local field is low and there is a big gap between the professional qualifications of school principals and front-line teachers. Comparatively, the gap in professional qualifications of staff in School B was bigger than in School A. This important factor will be taken into account when discussing the strategies used by the schools in the process of improvement in Section 6.2 and how those teachers perceived and conceived the characteristics of effective leadership in Sections 6.4 and 6.5 respectively.



#### 5.2.4 Support Staff

Since the background of the support staff was relatively homogeneous and the number of support staff in the two schools was 4 persons in total, I will only describe the profiles of the support staff that I interviewed.

##### - Age Range

	Below 40	41-50	51 and above
School A	0	1	1
School B	0	1	1

The support staff of both schools were in middle adulthood and approaching to late adulthood. In fact, one of them had already reached retirement age.

##### - Level of Educational Attainment

	No Education	Primary	Secondary
School A	0	2	0
School B	0	1	1

All of them had received primary education at least. For School B, the clerical staff had secondary education.

- **Length of Service**

	1-5 years	6-10 years	11-15 years	15-20 years
School A	1	1	0	0
School B	0	1	0	1

For School A, 1 member of the support staff had worked in the school for only 1 year and the other for 10 years. For School B, 1 support staff had worked for 8 years and the other for more than 15 years. With the exception of 1 support staff in school A, all staff had been serving the schools for a long period of time.

**Summary**

On the whole, members of support staff of the two schools had been serving for a long period of time. Since they were responsible for housekeeping and providing custodial care to young children, they were seldom regarded as the major actors in the schooling process. However, they frequently interacted with young children and communicated with their parents on a day-to-day basis. Attention should be paid to whether the quality of the service provided by this group of long-service support staff had a significant impact on the quality of early childhood programmes. I attempt to give voice to this group of school stakeholders in the discussion in Section 6.1.

### 5.2.5 Parent Groups

I conducted 4 interviews with the parents in a group of 3 to 5 people, two groups of parents from each school. The two groups were taken from the parents of the class of the 5-6 year-olds and the class that graduated in 2005. Group A and B were the parents of School A while Group C and D were the parents of School B.

Group A	Age Range	Level of Educational Attainment	Occupation	Family Income	No. of children attending the program	Voluntary work for school
A1	Below 30	Secondary	Not working	10,000-15,000	2	yes
A2	30-39	Secondary	Non-professional	30,000-40,000	1	no
A3	40-49	Tertiary	Non-professional	40,000 or above	2	no
A4	40-49	Secondary	Non-professional	20,000-30,000	1	yes
A5	Below 30	Secondary	Non-professional	20,000-30,000	1	no

Group B	Age Range	Level of Educational Attainment	Occupation	Family Income	No. of children attending the program	Voluntary work for school
B1	40-49	Secondary	Not working	40,000 or above	1	yes
B2	40-49	Secondary	Non-professional	30,000-40,000	1	yes
B3	50-59	Secondary	Not working	5,000-10,000	1	yes

<b>Group C</b>	<b>Age Range</b>	<b>Level of Educational Attainment</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Family Income</b>	<b>No. of children attending the program</b>	<b>Voluntary work for school</b>
C1	30-39	Secondary	Not working	20,000-30,000	1	yes
C2	30-39	Secondary	Not working	10,000-15,000	1	no
C3	30-39	Secondary	Not working	15,000-20,000	2	yes
C4	30-39	Secondary	Not working	20,000-30,000	2	no

<b>Group D</b>	<b>Age Range</b>	<b>Level of Educational Attainment</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Family Income</b>	<b>No. of children attending the program</b>	<b>Voluntary work for school</b>
D1	40-49	Secondary	Non-professional	30,000-40,000	2	no
D2	40-49	Secondary	Not working	10,000-15,000	2	yes
D3	40-49	Secondary	Not working	30,000-40,000	2	no
D4	40-49	Tertiary	Not working	40,000 or above	2	yes
D5	40-49	Tertiary	Not working	40,000 or above	2	yes

- **Age Range**

There were 17 parents in total. Only 2 of them were below the age of 30. Except 1 parent in the age range 50 to 59, the rest of them were either in the age range 30 to 39 or 40 to 49.

- **Level of Educational Attainment**

Only three of the parents had tertiary education. The remaining 14 parents attained only secondary education. These parents had the average level of educational attainment.

- **Occupation**

Apparently, the occupations of the parents were closely tied with their levels of educational attainment. For those who were working, all of them were non-professionals. Their occupations included office staff, accounting clerk and secretary.

- **Family Income**

Since the nature of School A was for the children of working parents or children from low income families, most of the parents that I interviewed were working, and those who were not working had relatively low family incomes. For School B.

most of the parents were not working. Probably, they were more flexible in terms of time to join the interviews. Relatively, only 2 of them had lower family incomes in the range of HK\$10,000-15,000 per month.

- **No. of Children Attending the Case Study School**

As mentioned in Section 2.4.2, the *Key Statistics of the 2001 Population Census* indicated that the average domestic household size was getting smaller from 4.2 in 1976 to 3.1 in 2001 (Census and Statistics Department, 2002). That is to say, families with children usually had only 1 or 2 children.

2 parents of School A had 2 children who had attended or were attending the same school. 7 out of 9 parents of School B had 2 children who had attended or were attending the same school. It seemed that the schools were highly preferred by the parents.

- **Involvement in Voluntary Work**

Almost half of the parents that I interviewed had been involved or were currently involved in voluntary work for the schools. Since these parents were selected and invited by the school principals, they might be more active for school affairs. These parents could not be seen as representative of the whole group of parents with children in the schools. However, because of their involvement in schools, they could provide more information on the leadership process and practice.

## Summary

As mentioned in Section 4.2, I deliberately selected one kindergarten and one child care centre for this study because the nature of preschool education had historically resulted in two separate systems of “education” and “care”. Generally speaking, most of the parents that I interviewed had received secondary education and those who were working were non-professionals. The majority of them had a family income ranging from HK\$15,000 to HK\$40,000 per month. It would be interesting to see how these parents from two different preschool settings who had similar socio-economic background defined quality in early childhood education. What are the similarities and differences between the views of the two parent groups? Do the parents from the kindergarten define the purpose of preschooling as mainly for preparing their young children for formal education and those from the child care centre regard the function of preschools as solely for custodial care? These questions will be discussed in Section 6.1.

## **Chapter 6     School Stakeholders' Perspectives**

This chapter presents an analysis of the multiple perspectives of school stakeholders of the two case study schools on how quality programmes can be defined; the process of school improvement and the factors that influence it; perspectives on the relationship between the leader and the led and the roles of school stakeholders in the process; perceptions on the characteristics of leadership practice; and lastly conceptions of effective leadership and management. I will discuss the data on each theme separately. I will provide a summary at the end of each section to point out how these organizing themes link with the discussion in the next two chapters, as I did in Chapter Five. In the conclusion, I will argue that the organizing themes are the key points, and that between them they make up a model of effective leadership for quality in the early childhood programmes. This is linked with the thematic network of school leadership that I developed in Chapter Four (see Figure 3).

### **6.1     Definitions of Quality Programmes**

It is commonly believed that successful leadership is linked to school outcomes in many ways. Whether the leadership practice is judged to be effective or not largely depends on the quality of programme offered by that school. As mentioned in Section 2.2, “quality” is defined as providing necessary and appropriate custody and care to young children, or preparing them for formal schooling in Hong Kong (Oppen, 1992). As promoted by supranational organizations, the current view of



the function of early childhood education has begun to shift from child rearing to developmental nurturing (OECD, 2002; World Bank, 1999). How fully is this view of quality in early childhood education shared by various school stakeholders of the two schools in this study? In addition, as mentioned in the same section, “quality closely links into service demand” and is perceived by the consumer in the private market (Shaw 2000: 57). How do the two schools work between the parental preferences and professional values in the local market-driven context of early childhood education? I will use these questions as a guide when analyzing the responses of the informants in the following.

From the interview data I found that a quality early childhood programme was commonly defined in terms of its distinctive features and intimate staff-child relationship. For the parents, a quality programme meant more than the care and education provided to children in school, and also referred to the quality of total support given to children and families and the maintenance of close communication with parents. I will elaborate on these elements in turn below.

#### **6.1.1 Programme Features**

The informants in this study included those in the school management, some practicing in the front-line with a basic or advanced level of professional training, and some service buyers. They defined programme features in terms of the comprehensiveness of the programme, mode of learning and effectiveness, and learning motivation and attitudes.

The school management believed that the children's background, abilities and developmental needs should be taken into account when designing the school-based curriculum. In putting this view of programme quality into practice, they thought that some "flexibility" should be given to the school over issues of curriculum design. The following interview extract<sup>3</sup> reflects this view:

In the past, we designed the centralized curriculum largely based on the commercial resource packages. However, we found that the teachers did the preparation for teaching only with the materials that we gave to them. The content of resource packages was completed but it had limitations. Some argued that the centralized curriculum could help release the workload of teachers on preparing lesson plans. But I think it was hard to monitor the teaching quality of the individual teacher. Taking this into consideration, we decided that each school should have to develop their own school-based curriculum. (086) (Governor A)

It seemed that the school management understood that a certain degree of autonomy had to be given to the schools in the process of curriculum improvement. But at the same time, they still exercised some control over the orientation of the curriculum. The two contradictory forces created a centralized-decentralized dichotomy (Hopkins et al., 1994). For example, Governor A brought her ideas on open education to School A.

In fact, I allow each school the autonomy to implement their vision and mission. My ultimate goal is that each school can develop its own comprehensive programme to flexibly meet the individual needs and interests of children. Since the classrooms of School A

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<sup>3</sup> Note: The original translations from the Chinese transcripts have not been edited further. In some instances there may be awkward constructions in some quotations. The decision made that it was to better preserve original nuances than to edit for fluidity of language.

are small in size, I proposed to adopt the open plan design [with which the space of the whole school can be fully utilized] for different interest/learning corners. I hope that this could help improve the programme quality. (086) (Governor A)

The school principals shared the views of the school management on the orientation of curriculum design. Both agreed that the programme objective was mainly to enhance the all-round development of children and to provide them with enjoyable learning experiences. Since the school principals were the major actors in implementing the curriculum in the schools, it was inevitable that they needed to take the parental preference into consideration. This intention was subtly reflected in the following excerpt:

A quality programme is to help children develop their learning ability. In the past, I expected the children could recite what they learnt from the class to their parents. Now, I think developing children's learning skills is more important than feeding them with knowledge... Learning should be fun. We hope that our children will enjoy learning... We cannot tell instantly how many words the children can learn after a lesson. However, I am pretty sure that they can gradually internalize what has been taught to them. (071) (Principal A)

Apparently, the ideology of early childhood education in Hong Kong is influenced by the field of developmental psychology in the United States. Developmentalism has been translated into the terms "child-centeredness" and "developmentally appropriate practice" (Bredekamp, 1997). As mentioned in Section 2.2.3, this ideology was advocated in *Performance Indicators*, published by the Quality Assurance Inspectorate of the EMB in 2000. In the interviews, the teachers of both schools frequently mentioned these terms. Meanwhile, they also recognized the

importance of academic learning in the early years. They explicitly expressed this point of view in the interviews. An example is provided below for illustration.

The older children have already developed their self-care skills. It is the time for them to pay more attention on their studies [academic learning]. For example, they need to learn how to hold a pencil, express themselves properly, and concentrate their attention on the lesson. (016) (Teacher E)

Most of the parents had the same view that a good programme should provide various learning experiences based on individual needs and interest to support all-round development of the children and arouse learning motivation. But interestingly, the parents placed stress upon their views of learning attitudes and learning effectiveness in the interviews. In this study, many parents excitedly explained to me that their children were self-motivated to do homework and were not afraid of academic learning. The following is one of the examples:

My child arrives home at twelve every day. The first thing that he does is homework. I always ask him to take off his school uniform, have lunch and take a shower first. He does not listen to me. I have no way to stop him doing that. After he finishes the homework, he is very happy to take a shower, have lunch and then take an afternoon nap. (040) (Parent D)

The possible reason is that the “backwash effect” of primary studies creates a heavy academic pressure on young children (Biggs, 1998). Parents have to pay a lot of attention to the transition between preschool and primary education. They hope their children enjoy the preschool life, but on the other hand, they worry about whether the “learning through play” approach is able to prepare their

children for academic learning in primary schools. If a preschool could make both ends meet, it would effectively relieve parents of their burden. This point will be further discussed in Section 6.2.1.

### **6.1.2 Intimate Staff-child Relationship**

The word “attachment” is used frequently in the field of child psychology. It refers to a special bond characterized by the qualities of maternal-infant or primary caregiver-infant relationships. In the preschool settings, it generally refers to an intimate relationship between staff and children. From the interview data, I found that many of the informants including teachers, members of support staff and parents, valued the close relationship between staff and children.

One parent recalled her experience of being a volunteer for School B. She was deeply impressed by the caring attitudes of the teachers. She said,

The teachers are working very hard for the children. They are so patient and caring. It is so difficult for me to take care of my children, even just two of them. You can imagine that it is a tough task to take care of twenty young children at one time. It is quite often that there are some ‘naughty’ kids wandering around and disturbing the class routine. The teachers always try their best to calm them down. (052) (Parent C)

In addition to the evidence from parent groups, the members of support staff had similar observations. This was well illustrated with the following extract relating to what the staff said about the caring attitudes of the teachers.

Everyone has one's own character, so do the young children. The teachers teach the children to learn based on their personalities. Some are obedient but some are not [naughty]. No matter how difficult the situation is, the teachers are very patient in their work with the children. (054) (Staff A)

This caring attitude was not only demonstrated by the teachers but also by the members of support staff. The following is a typical example of how a member of support staff was actively involved in the learning activity.

Our school uses the shared reading incentive scheme to enhance the language development of the children. For example, when I am mopping the floor, the kids often ask me, "Auntie, I want to read you a story..." Then, I will sign the records for them. After collecting a number of signatures, the children can have the reward from the teachers...In fact, I do not know whether they pronounce the words correctly or not but I will try to correct their mistakes as best as I can. Anyway, I think it is a good way to encourage those timid to read in front of others. (060, 062) (Staff A)

There were other data which suggested that the members of support staff had an intimate relationship with the children. Two parents told me their experiences as follows:

We met Auntie X in the Park'N Shop one afternoon. She gave my son an apple. My son likes all the Aunties in the school very much...

Another parent said:

My son was very upset when Auntie Y resigned. That Auntie paid a visit to the children afterwards. My son kept mentioning this to me for "three days and nights" [a colloquial expression means a very long period of time]. (067, 068) (Parent B)

### 6.1.3 Close Communication with Parents

The above examples suggested that the staff members made a wholehearted, joint effort to take care of the children. From the parents' point of view, a good programme was something more than the care and education provided to their children in school. The parents in general also focused on how well the schools could maintain close communication with them. To respond to the demands of parents, the staff members of both schools, including school principals, teachers and members of support staff, consistently did their best to maintain such communication through various channels, such as open days, parents' meetings, opinion surveys, newsletters and phone calls. The schools provided opportunities for parents to make class observations and to do voluntary work. This kind of "direct involvement" was to help parents gain a better understanding of the operation of the programme. Principal A described vividly her experience of working with parents:

I wait at the school entrance every morning to talk with the parents. I will give them opportunity to raise their concerns in parents' meetings. We established the parent volunteer group two years ago. It is a channel for them to express their views. If they do are not satisfied with the school, we will try our best to improve. Every year, we conduct a survey to collect their opinions. (034) (Principal A)

In addition, the school principals demanded that the teachers should be very sensitive to the needs of children. The teachers were required to identify clearly what the children had learned from the class "every day". Then, they could share

“the evidence of learning” with the parents. This was to demonstrate the effectiveness of the school and to make the parents satisfied with the educational service provided by the school. Teacher D explained as follows:

We have to maintain close communication with parents. We let them know every detail of how we take care of their children...All we have to do is to make our work transparent to the parents. (140)  
(Teacher D)

Although some parents might find that it was not necessary for the teachers to report on every single detail, they felt very satisfied if it was done as a routine practice. The kind of communicative approach the schools adopted can best be described, as I have termed it, as “surveillance-like” communication. A typical example could be the following:

The teachers will call me if anything happens to my child. In fact, sometimes it is just the nitty-gritty. It is easy for children to get hurt when playing together. I remember that a teacher called me up and told that my boy burst into tears after having a quarrel with his classmate. Anyway, I think it is good to do that. (052) (Parent C)

#### **6.1.4 Total Support to the Children and Families**

I found that the case study schools tended to perceive giving total support to the children and families as part of their responsibilities. What they did was much more than the formal role and functions of a preschool. The boundary of the educational service provided by the schools became blurred. The schools actively gave help to the families in need. Below is a perfect example of this.



Some children are from single parent families. For example, we admitted a child whose mother was a hawker...People from the neighbourhood told me that the child wandered around in the streets every day after school. When he felt thirsty, he sipped the water from the fountain in the shopping mall... I felt very uncomfortable when I heard this. I was so worried about his safety. So, I got the approval from Governor B to allow him to stay for free lunch and stay until six o'clock in the evening. (034) (Principal B)

The following example also indicated the willingness of Principal A to offer help to a parent with a family problem.

Though I am not a social worker, I always 'talk' with the parents who look sad. This is the way to understand if they need support. I will try my best to help. I remember that I talked with a parent who suddenly burst into tears. I knew that something was wrong with her. Then, I referred her case to a social worker for the counselling service. (030) (Principal A)

This was echoed by a parent whose child had behavioural problems. The parent had no way to handle the misbehaviour and she was under stress. She appreciated that the teacher gave her emotional support to overcome the difficulty. The parent recalled the experience in the following way:

My child always kept his feelings to himself and was not willing to share his inner world with others...I felt so upset one afternoon. The teacher calmed me down and asked me not to be too worried. She took her time to give me 'counselling'. She was so caring to my child and to me, too. (050) (Parent D)

The schools also played an active role in helping the low-income families. They tried to help relieve those parents of the financial burden. One member of support

staff provided the piece of evidence in this respect. Staff D told me that Governor B was very considerate and caring towards those families in need. For example, the families that had recently moved into the community had to spend most of their income on renovation. Taking this into consideration, the school offered them a discount on the tuition fee.

## **Summary**

From the data collected in the interviews, I found that a quality early childhood programme was commonly defined by various stakeholder groups in terms of the comprehensiveness of the programme, its mode of learning and effectiveness, and learning motivation and attitudes. There was no significant difference in the perspectives of those programme qualities held by the school management, members of teaching staff and the parents that I interviewed in this study; and the views of parents from the child care centre were quite similar to those from the kindergarten. This suggested that the views of these stakeholder groups on the quality of early childhood programmes have begun to shift from child rearing to developmental nurturing but with an emphasis on academic learning. One possible reason for this is that the “backwash effect” of primary education creates a heavy academic pressure on early childhood education. In sum, the views of various stakeholder groups in this study were similar to the global views of the functions of preschooling as discussed in Section 2.2.

In addition, the intimate relationship between staff and children was an important dimension of a quality programme. The bonding was built up not solely by the class teachers but also through the joint effort of all members of the school. This research finding indicated that the members of support staff, who were seldom regarded as the major actors in the preschooling process, played a significant part in it. Moreover, from the perspective of parents, a good programme meant more than the care and education provided to their children in the school setting. It referred to the quality of total support to the children and their families and the maintenance of close communication with parents. If we apply the knowledge of market theory to the local field, the parents are the service buyers and the schools are the service providers. There was no doubt that the parental preferences and their needs were consistently addressed by the school management and staff members.

In putting the ideology of child centeredness into practice, the school management understood that some autonomy had to be given to the school but they still exercised some control over the process of curriculum development. The two contradictory forces created a centralized - decentralized dichotomy. This point will be thoroughly discussed in Section 7.3. The interview data also revealed that the two schools had to reconcile the two sides in a strategic sense: learning through play and academic pressure. This finding was consistent with Shaw's (2000) argument, concerning the quality discourse in the private market, that the quality of early childhood programmes of the two case study schools was closely linked to parental preference. The ability of the schools to reconcile dichotomies was also

visible in the resolution of the conflict between the professional values and beliefs held by the educational practitioners and the demand for academic learning imposed by the parents. However, I wonder whether the provision of care and education in those schools which cannot reconcile the two sides of learning through play and academic pressure is truly relevant and of a high quality if they are too inclined to follow the dictates of parental choice. I will address this important question in Section 7.2.

## **6.2 Views on the Process of School Improvement and the Influencing Factors Involved**

The local education reform and the keen competition among preschools are the two driving forces that almost leave no option for the schools to stay as they have been. Quite commonly the local preschools try their best to improve their programmes and services in order to increase student recruitment. Several questions arise from this that are related to the overall focus of the study. What strategies did the schools in this study employ to sharpen their competitive edge in the market place? In the process of school improvement, how was leadership exercised at different levels? Was the leadership exercised at a centralized level or in a diffused form? What were the factors influencing effective leadership in the school context? The themes discussed below shed light on these questions.

### **6.2.1 Diversified Challenges vs. Multi-level Support**

The interview data indicated that there were a number of factors influencing leadership in the process of school improvement. They were the diversified challenges, including government policy, pressure from interfacing with primary education, keen competition among preschools in the local field, diversity of parental expectations, increased demands for accountability and physical constraints. While facing these challenges, the case study schools gained multilevel support from their own parent organization, school governor, sibling schools, their teaching team and parents. I will examine these impeding and promoting factors in the discussion that follows.

As mentioned in Section 2.4.1, the education sector has been running under conditions that approximate to a free market. In response to the recent public concern about the quality of early education, the government now actively seeks to hold preschools to greater accountability for their service standards. The introduction of *Performance Indicators* in 2000 signifies a policy shift from minimal intervention to legitimized control (Ho, in press).

The interview data suggested that the increasing control of the local education authority in the form of quality assurance policy had both positive and negative impacts on the operation of schools and their development. To a certain extent, the policy had subtly influenced the design of the curriculum and pedagogy in the case study schools. For example, Governor B formulated the direction of school development after the quality assurance inspection of EMB:

We got good results in the quality assurance inspection. The inspectors told us that our programme was comprehensive. However, if we want to further improve, we have to reconsider adopting a portfolio assessment approach for documenting the children's learning and development. I took this advice to make future plans. (084) (Governor B)

This was echoed by the teachers of School B. Teacher F said, "The inspectors advised our school to hire expatriate teachers to teach English. However, it was difficult for those teachers to mix with the local staff." Moreover, Teacher J stated, "Our school intended to adopt the mixed group approach to enhance peer learning. However, this idea was not recommended by the inspectors." From the teachers'

perspectives, the policy imposed some constraint on their autonomy in curriculum and pedagogical decision-making.

In contrast with this, the management of School A turned the impact of educational policy into a driving force for school development. Governor A said the quality assurance policy promoted the ideology of child centeredness in educating young children. This broadened “the scope of the horizons” of the front-line teachers and provided some pressure for the school to make further improvements (118).

School B benefited from the policy of quality assurance inspection. The school made known the results of the inspection to show a track record of school success to attract parents. Teacher G of School B had gone through the process of inspection and described her experience as follows:

Due to a rapid decrease in birth-rate after 1997, the demand for preschool education and services dropped sharply in the past few years. This led to the keenest competition among local preschools particularly in the period of the SARS outbreak. Everyone in school was worried about job security and was under great pressure. We tried our very best to prepare for the quality assurance inspection. It was a big challenge to us. Luckily, our school was graded excellent in the exercise. The QAI report helped us build up the school reputation to attract parents. (096) (Teacher G)

As mentioned in Section 6.1.1, parents in the interviews appreciated the case study schools could effectively prepare their children for academic learning. As consistently stated by the majority of the informants, the “backwash” effect of

primary education was the significant factor influencing the in-school processes. Parent D told me in the group interview, “Some parents worry that the curriculum presently used is ‘too simple’ and that their children may have difficulties in the first year of primary studies.” The case study schools tried to find a good balance between the value of “learning through play” and the pressure of academic learning imposed on young children. Parent C had an interesting description of how School B made both ends meet strategically.

The school helped the children do revision. The teachers did not just ask them to remember the answers but also the corresponding questions. They could effectively motivate the children to do the exercises. I found that it was good. This would help the children to be familiar with the format of tests and examinations in the primary studies. (187) (Parent C)

Under the pressure of decreasing student enrolment, preschools in the local field have to sharpen their competitive edge. The schools in this study were no exception. Principal A said that the curriculum innovation of adopting the “Space Approach” was the edge to attract parents. School B made a lot of effort in relation to school promotion. One member of support staff in School B said that Principal B had a lot of “innovative ideas” for student recruitment. Teacher F had a similar observation as follows:

For programme promotion, our school introduced a number of measures, such as using a new English curriculum, conducting more moral activities, installing a ‘plasma TV’ at the school entrance and putting up advertisements in public transport. (094) (Teacher F)



In addition to the external competition in the educational market, the schools had to face the diversity of parental expectations and increased demands for accountability. It was very crucial that if the parents were not satisfied with the service provided by the school, they could withdraw their children from the programme and move them to other schools any time they liked. The case study schools were often caught between the diversified demands of the parents. Some parents became more convinced of the correlation between early and later development periods and children as a potential resource to be nurtured, while others might still perceive the preschool service as a preparation for primary school. The schools had to spend a lot of time and effort to communicate with parents individually. Principal A related her experience of working with those parents:

I know some parents in fact do not support the curriculum policy of our school. They do not argue with me just as a matter of courtesy. They push their children to learn and to write a lot of vocabulary at home. I think if the children are self-motivated and capable of doing this, it doesn't matter. However, if the parents are pushing too hard, I will explain the underlying reason to them individually. I will also invite those parents who share our views to persuade them. This strategy works very well in our situation. (072) (Principal A)

Some parents in the interviews had similar observations. Parent B recalled that one parent was not satisfied with the new English curriculum. She preferred the traditional one. The school principal and teachers patiently explained to that parent about the merits of the new approach. (074)

Principal B mentioned that the school was facing with the increased demand for accountability in recent years and some parents were too demanding. She was “trained” to be very skilful in handling the unreasonable parents. She said,

Some parents prefer to have a daily report on their children’s learning and development rather than a weekly one. I think it will create a very heavy workload for the teachers. On average, one teacher has to take care of 30 children, namely 15 in the morning session and 15 in the afternoon. In other words, a teacher has to prepare 30 brief reports every day. I try my best to explain the difficulties to the parents. You know...sometimes, they still insist us to do so. I will use a ‘tricky answer’ to ‘persuade’ those parents. The answer is that we need to hire more teachers to share the extra workload. If so, we have to increase the tuition fee. Anyway, it works. (122) (Principal B)

Similarly, in view of the increased demand for accountability, Principal A held regular monthly meetings with the parents to report on the children’s learning progress and to collect their opinions on teaching effectiveness.

As mentioned in Section 2.4.2, the research conducted by Oppen (1992) showed that location was the most common reason parents gave for selecting a preschool (57% of 2874 surveyed), followed by concern about the physical environment, the equipment and materials, and its reputation. The physical environment of a school is a critical factor in parental choice. School B was located in private premises. The school did not have an outdoor playground but a small play area. Principal B mentioned this constraint frequently in the interview.

At least one fourth of the parents did not do the registration because of the school environment. Therefore, I need to use an innovative

interior design to make full use of the limited space for school activities. Since all the partitions between the classrooms are movable, it is convenient to turn the small classrooms into one big hall in a short period of time. We hold school functions in this way. (126) (Principal B)

While facing diversified challenges in the process of improvement, the schools gained internal and external support from multiple sources: their own parent organization, sibling schools, school governor, their teaching team and parents. As mentioned in Section 5.1, the two case study schools were operated by non-profit making organizations with a number of sibling schools and were overseen by experienced coordinators. Obviously, these favourable factors helped to support leadership in the process of improvement for school excellence.

Particularly, Organization A provided adequate financial support to its preschools.

Governor A said,

“Our organization has a long history of social service in Hong Kong. It is quite easy for us to solicit donations from the public for school development projects. Besides, the resources can be effectively used and shared among the schools. This is very cost effective.” (068) (Governor A).

Governor B stated that the school board gave her autonomy in budgeting. She could use the revenue generated from school fees to purchase the necessary teaching resources and materials. More importantly, the management of both schools appreciated that their parent organizations gave them intangible support in upholding the core value of child-centeredness under the pressure of keen competition in the market.

Some preschools in Hong Kong are run independently and some are operated by a parent organization with a number of sibling schools (see Section 2.3.2). In this study, the case study schools worked very closely with their sibling schools. Collaboration took the form of joint effort on curriculum development, professional exchange on pedagogical design, and redeployment of manpower resources. This type of collegiality became important for strengthening the professional competence of the teaching teams of the schools. Many teachers in the interviews valued the deep collaboration with the sibling schools. The following is one of the examples.

We discuss with the teachers from the sibling schools on the implementation of the new curriculum approach. We learn from their experiences that helps us consolidate and review our teaching practice. (032) (Teacher A)

In fact, collegiality among the sibling schools was largely mobilized by the school governors. Their direct involvement was significant in the development and operation of the schools. They kept themselves abreast of the latest trends of development in the local field. They had a good sense of academic vision to lead the direction of change in the schools. Principal A shared her views with me in the interview as follows:

She [Governor A] has a vision for the school's future development. She can identify the potential problems in the processes of change and help us solve the problems. (142) (Principal A)

Besides, laying out the blueprint of future development of the schools, the school governors directly involved themselves in front-line practice by giving their advice to the teachers. For example, Governor A made class observations together with the school principal to monitor the implementation of the new curriculum. She gave advice on the classroom setup and the materials used. For other instance, Governor B made an effort to participate in the process of implementation of innovations. She prepared the framework of the portfolio assessment system for the teachers.

The internal support from the teachers was part of the synergy involved in building up the competitive advantage of the case study schools. There was no staff turnover in either school in recent years. The teachers had close social and working relationships. In the interviews, the teachers frequently used the term “teamwork” to describe the mutual support given to one another.

When I encounter any difficulties in handling the children’s behavioural and learning problems, I can gain advice from my colleagues. When I have problems in answering the enquiry of parents, Principal A and other teachers are willing to offer me help.  
(080) (Teacher D)

In addition to the mutual support of the teaching teams, the parents were an important asset for the schools in the process of improvement. The schools involved the parents in various aspects of their work, such as conducting special activities for children, supporting children’s learning at home, and providing assistance to share the teachers’ workload. For example, Principal A planned to

invite a parent to provide assistance on teaching Putonghua. In another instance, Principal B invited the parents of the graduation class to share with other parents the experience of their children in the first year of primary studies so as to give proof of the school's effectiveness.

The enormous support from the parents was well recognized by the teachers. In addition to the comments of the school principals, the teachers found the parental support to be an impetus and encouragement for them to work harder and better. Teacher A stated that the parents were willing to undertake voluntary work for school. She said, "We get along very well with the parents. The trust and support given by them is very important to us". (114)

One member of the support staff had witnessed the contribution made by a volunteer parent. Staff D said, "The children's toilets were very uncomfortable and shabby. Principal A invited one parent whose child had graduated a few years ago to do the interior design and renovation work. The toilets look totally different now." (070)

### **6.2.2 Process of Change**

Proponents on the management of change describe it as a process of transformation involving individuals, groups or institutions, leading to a realignment of existing values, practices and outcomes (Morrison, 1998). As mentioned in Section 2.3.2, vision-building, empowerment, staff development,

organizational learning, restructuring, monitoring and problem-solving are common parameters in the process of school improvement. In particular, research on effective schools in Western countries indicates that a form of professional leadership is often associated with school improvement. Mastrangelo and his colleagues (2004: 436) define the concept of professional leadership “as setting the vision and mission for the organization, creating a process for achieving organizational goals, and aligning processes and procedures, people and infrastructure, to achieve organizational goals”. The literature on the school improvement and management of change prompted three questions. First, as influenced by the contextual factors mentioned earlier, how did the case study schools pave the way to success in the local educational market? Second, was the process of change experienced by the schools different from what was documented in the literature? Third, where the teams of professional staff were not fully developed, did the schools adopt the same strategies in the process as can be found in reports from countries of the West? I will discuss these questions in line with my research themes in the following section.

Fullan (1999) describes the first phase of school change as “initiation”. This refers to the process leading up to and including a decision to adopt or proceed with a change (see Section 2.3.2). Evidence gathered from this study indicated that the school governors of the case study schools were the key figures in initiating the change. In collaboration with the school principals, they led the school improvement by using the strategy of vision building. I use the words “persuasion” or “lobbying” to describe the way that the school governors built up the common

goal. Teacher C described “the process of consultation” to me in the individual interview.

As far as I know, the new idea was initiated by Governor A. We were informed of the curriculum change by Principal A. They held meetings with us for consultation. Then, Principal A solicited our opinions on the process of implementation and the potential difficulties we might encounter in teaching practices. After that, we launched the new change in class together. (048) (Teacher C)

The experience told by the teacher revealed that by and large, the nature of change initiated by the school management was still “top-down”. The school management used so-called “consultation” for building up the common goal. In fact, the nature of the consultation itself was a type of briefing session. They gave space for staff to discuss the implementation of change rather than the direction of change. In general, a “top-down approach” of management was quite accepted by the staff members of the two schools. As I interpret this, the school management gave some “autonomy” to the teachers in implementing the change in daily operation as a “token” for exchange.

Coppieters (2005: 135) suggests that the restructuring of a formal school system in the process of change includes a number of measures: “open decision-making processes, distribution of decision-making authority, team teaching arrangements, brief weekly planning meetings, frequent problem-solving sessions among sub-groups, and common preparation periods for teachers needing to work together”. The schools in this study restructured their systems in a certain way similar to the



above measures. Comparatively, the change in formal school structure initiated by School A was more fundamental than the change in School B. Teacher C of School A explained the changes in school structure to me in the interview segment below:

The team leaders of sibling schools have the monthly meeting to discuss the learning theme...Then, the team leader shares the information with the class teachers in our working meetings. After reaching a consensus, we do the lesson planning together. We also discuss with the special education teacher in order to make the curriculum inclusive for the children with special needs. (058)  
(Teacher C)

Generally speaking, the teachers of School A suggested that they were more involved in curriculum coordination and had a better understanding of other people's work within the school and the operation of sibling schools as well. This kind of collaboration was shifting from independence to interdependence (Hoyle, 1975). Either strategically or spontaneously, the teachers worked together to tackle the complicated education problems imposed on them by external forces.

As also mentioned by Coppieters (2005: 136), "development of school growth plans, development of individual growth plans, defining priorities for action, periodic review and revision of goals and priorities, and well-designed processes for implementation of specific initiatives" were the strategies often used by schools in the management of change. Similarly, the case study schools adopted these strategies but with a couple of differences. The differences were collaboration among sibling schools, continuous professional development, and support of outside experts from the local tertiary institutions. As both of the

teaching teams only held professional qualifications at sub-degree level, there was still a long way for them to go to become fully fledged in terms of professional competence. Consequently, the schools had to use the above strategies for professional enrichment. In addition to these, School A applied for government funding as an additional resource to hire outside experts to provide consultancy in the process of making a radical change to the curriculum and pedagogy. This type of “second-order” change seeks to alter the fundamental ways in which organizations were put together, including both the formal and informal structures and roles (Wallace and Pocklington, 2002).

On the other hand, School B arranged overseas visits and invited outside experts to conduct seminars and workshops to enrich the knowledge base of the teachers and enhance their teaching skills and technique. The change basically focused only on the “know-how” aspect of the new assessment system. Without disturbing the organizational structures and roles, this type of “single-order” change aimed to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the existing practice (Wallace and Pocklington, 2002).

Moreover, both of the school principals claimed that they laid emphasis on capacity building of the front-line teachers. This concept refers to enabling others to exercise leadership at all levels in the organization by creating structures as the means to nourish learning and achievement (Harris and Lambert, 2003). From the interview data, I found that the claims made by the two principals were different in nature and had different connotations. School A focused more on strengthening the leading role of the frontline teachers while School B emphasized the enhancement

of the professional competence of teachers in order to carry out their responsibilities more effectively. The comments given by Teacher B of School A and Principal B respectively in the following were the relevant pieces of evidence:

I find that we teachers are more mature and self-responsible. We don't need to rely too much on Principal A now. We are serious about making preparations for staff meetings. We become more independent in our work. (024) (Teacher B)

Regarding the professional growth of the teachers, I assign the less experienced to work with the parents who have a lower level of educational attainment. I think the teachers feel more confident...Otherwise, the teachers will be under great pressure when working with the parents who have higher level of education. (050) (Principal B)

In the process of implementing the change, the case study schools shared similar experiences. Both principals regularly made progress reports to the school governors and gained their feedback. As mentioned previously, they maintained close communication with the parents on the learning of their children. Strategically, the schools provided information about the new curriculum change through parent's meeting and collected the views of parents through opinion surveys. The schools explained the underlying rationale of change to the parents. The principals undertook thorough follow-up actions with those parents who might resist the changes and were concerned about the process. The schools also made efforts to provide evidence of the children's learning to the parents to prove the effectiveness of the new change.

I explained the aims and objectives of the change to the parents...Some parents might still suspect the effectiveness of the

new change at the very beginning...When the parents found their children knew how to write sentences, read newspapers and were self-motivated to learn, they would understand and recognize the objectives of the new change. (112) (Governor A)

This was echoed by a parent as follows:

In the process of implementation, the school management was willing to listen to us. Principal A collected our feedback and opinions for further improvement. When necessary, she took follow-up actions with us individually instead of muddling through. (074) (Parent B)

Workload was always the concern of the teachers in this study. The school management understood that the problem of workload had to be resolved; otherwise the change would not take place in the classrooms. As mentioned earlier, School B adopted the portfolio assessment approach. Principal B tried her best to balance between the workload of the teachers and the demands of parents. Teacher G appreciated the efforts made by Principal B in this regard.

If too much 'evidence' [photos, art work and teacher's comments, etc.] is put into the children's portfolios, it will create a heavy workload to us. If 'too simple', the parents will not be satisfied. Principal B tries her efforts to reconcile the interests of three parties: teachers, parents and children. (048) (Teacher G)

Collaborative culture and norms of mutual support were the elements that could be found in the process of change in the case study schools. Both school principals encouraged their staff members to collaborate with others and give mutual support. The following examples reflected that the schools valued teamwork as an important contributor to school success.

Although the class teachers and the team leaders have their own roles and responsibilities, we all contribute our ideas in staff meetings....After reaching a consensus, we do the preparation for teaching together. (028) (030) (Teacher A)

The renovation of the toilets was just completed before the commencement of the new school term. We had to do the clean-up within a very tight schedule....Principal B, the teachers and I helped the housekeepers do the cleaning. We didn't mind the messy work. We felt very happy to do it together. (082) (Staff D)

## **Summary**

The experiences of the two case study schools indicated that the diversified challenges added to the complexity of the process of curriculum innovation in the school contexts. The school management had to reformulate the management of change from different perspectives: technical, political, and cultural (House, 1979). The two schools shared some similar experience while other aspects of change were different. Both of them laid emphasis on maintaining close communication with the school governors and parents. They adopted a different approach in the management of change. School A sought a radical change in curriculum innovation through partnership with external consultants. This strategy changed both the formal and informal structure of the school. Consequently, the teachers became more aware of their leading role in front-line practice through capacity building. In contrast with this, School B tended to follow the logic of a quick-fix approach that would get the teachers to change in certain specified ways with their knowledge enriched by outside experts from the local tertiary institutions, and then

put their new capabilities into practice. It basically involved no disturbance to the formal structure of school system.

As mentioned in Section 5.2.3, the two school principals had higher qualifications than their teaching staff. Comparatively, the gap in professional qualifications of staff in School B was bigger than that in School A. In other words, the teachers of School B, who had a lower level of professional qualifications, might not have been adequately prepared for making a radical change to the curriculum and pedagogy. Moreover, the governor of School B had obtained their training at diploma level more than twenty years ago. These were probably the reasons why the management of School B initiated a type of “single-order” change in the quality process. In addition, although both of the schools were rated as excellent in quality assurance inspections, this was in fact only a track record of one or two years prior to the time of this study. How can these two schools, particularly School B, sustain excellence in the increasingly complex and rapidly changing environment in the education market? In Section 7.4, I will discuss the issue of sustainability of developments in the schools in order to arrive at the wider implications for the sustainable development of the field of early childhood education in Hong Kong.

### **6.3 Perspectives on the Relationship between Leader and Led**

In this section, I will discuss the perspectives of different school stakeholders concerning the relationship between the leaders and the led and how they perceived their own roles in the leadership process. This lays the foundation for the discussions in the next two sections. One is on the views on characteristics of leadership practice and the other is the conceptions of effective leadership and management.

#### **6.3.1 Participation in Decision-making and Degree of Delegation**

I use two interconnected dimensions, namely boundaries of participation in decision-making and degree of delegation, to discuss the relationships between school stakeholders and their roles in the leadership process. In this regard, I quote two definitions to back up my arguments. Duke, Showers and Imber (1980: 26) state that, “school decisions are greater than a particular classroom, but not greater than a school including nine areas: instructional co-ordination, curriculum development, staff development, evaluation, general school improvement, personnel, rules and discipline, general administration, and policymaking”. McKenna (1998: 108) defines delegation as the act to “designate decision-making authority and task responsibilities to appropriate staff; effectively use their times, skills, and abilities and potentials.” In this study, the school principals defined the boundary of staff participation in decision-making within the area of curriculum and pedagogy and they made some degree of delegation to their teachers in the process of change and school operation. However, the delegation itself was

different in nature between the two schools. With reference to McKenna's definition, Principal A designated the task responsibilities and some decision-making authority to her staff while Principal B mainly focused on delegating task responsibilities in the leadership process.

I do not participate in the staff meetings. I think the teachers can express their opinions more freely [if I am not there]. Except for matters of emergency, I won't give them an agenda and guidelines. This is to give them a free hand to work things out.... (100)  
(Principal A)

The description provided by Principal A was consistent with what her staff told me. Teacher B said that Principal A chaired the meetings at the initial stage of the change. She gradually withdrew in the later stage. The teachers had to take turns to hold the meetings and lead the discussions. (020)

Since Principal A intended to delegate some authority and give the autonomy to her staff in the leadership process, her subordinates reciprocally found themselves taking up the leading role in the implementation of curriculum change. Teacher C cited an experience of coordinating the science curriculum.

The outside experts visited our school to teach us the subject knowledge and teaching skills in conducting science experiments with the children...Afterward, I had to compile the information and share it with other teachers. I taught them how to conduct science experiments. I found myself acting like a leader in the process. (080)  
(Teacher C)

In contrast with the situation in School A, Principal B delegated only the task responsibilities to her staff but not the embedded authority. In return, the staff of



School B tended to conform to the authority of the school management. Two teachers described the process of decision-making in the following terms:

When Principal B has a new idea, she will not order us to follow her direction immediately. She usually tells us to make a trial. After she has observed the process for a period of time, she discusses with us. Whether our suggestions are accepted or not all depends on her final decision. (142) (Teacher J)

Effective communication between a principal and the teachers is very important. Every week, we have the staff meeting with Principal B to facilitate the communication between us. It is difficult to work things out if we don't understand the thinking of Principal B. (028) (Teacher G)

If the knowledge of market theory is brought to bear on the local preschool education, it might be assumed that the two schools in this study actively involved their parents in decision-making processes. The reason behind this is that output closely links to service demand and quality is defined by the consumers in a private market (Shaw, 2000: 57) (see Section 2.2.1). This assumption implies that the power and influence of consumers significantly determines the running of an organisation that is responsive to the market. In line with this assumption, the interview data suggested that the school principals made considerable efforts to collect the parents' opinions on the orientation of the curriculum and pedagogy, the effectiveness of teaching and learning, and school activities. They also provided parent education through various channels, such as parents' meeting, daily conversations, telephone calls, newsletters, and opinion surveys.

Basically, I conduct opinion surveys for each school activity. Some are closed questions and some are open. The survey is to provide an opportunity for parents to express their views. (080) (Principal B)

The schools took actions to follow up parents' opinions thoroughly. This was consistently echoed by the parents. Parent D told me that she gave suggestions on the choice of curriculum content to the school. After consideration, School B accepted her opinion. (123)

Many investigators have concluded that encouraging participation in decision-making can increase the probability of change in organizations. However, some argue that no control in participatory decision-making may be just as damaging as no participation at all (Lammers, 1967: 213). The above examples indicated that parents participated actively in the process of decision-making and the schools valued such participation as an input for planning their educational service. But still, the boundary of participation was limited to school activities and the area of curriculum and pedagogy. For example, Principal A said the school management did not have any plans to involve parents in decision-making at school policy level. This indicated that the boundary of parents' participation in decision-making was well defined by the school management.

### **6.3.2 Relationship in Harmony**

The above discussion on participation in decision-making and delegation of authority prompts me to raise another important question. How could the staff be led in ways that enable them to become, as I shall term it, "restricted autonomous followers" without leading to a power struggle between the leader and the led within the school context? That is similar to the notion of organizational paradox

described by Moos (2003: 19). I inferred in the above discussion that a relationship of harmony was the answer to the question of power dynamics. The relationship among all school stakeholders was two-fold. One was social and the other was a working relationship. I will discuss each of these in turn below.

Characterised by caring and trustfulness, the social relationship was enjoyed by all stakeholders in the two case study schools. It constituted a positive school culture and atmosphere. The school principals and their followers together made joint efforts to build up a network of good social relationships in the schools. Teacher E of School A mentioned that they shared their personal life with each other, just like friends. This was echoed by a member of support staff. She said that Principal A was very kind to each of them. The following excerpt given by a parent of School B highlighted the good relationship between Principal B and her staff:

Principal B knows that the teachers are very hardworking and responsible. They try their best to serve the children and their families. She can put herself into the shoes of teachers as she was a front-line teacher many years ago. Principal B often has a social gathering with her staff after school. It seems that they enjoy each other's companion very much. (076) (Parent C)

Another parent in the group interview also mentioned that Principal B valued the social relationship with her staff and the parents.

For example, Principal B invited the volunteer parents and all staff to the celebration party after the school graduation ceremony last year. She took the opportunity to thank each of us. We all enjoyed the party very much. Principal B stayed for the whole night. She would not just pay the money for the party and then leave us alone. (078) (Parent C)

At the same time, the school principals and the stakeholders had a close working relationship. The principals were very willing to offer help to their staff whenever needed. Principal A said she would not mind working with her staff on trivial things. For example, she helped the staff wrapping up the gifts for the school graduation ceremony (146). This helpfulness and supportiveness was consistently mentioned by the teachers, support staff and parents. Below is the experience of Teacher G in her own words.

I know Principal B is very busy with the school matters. No matter how busy she is, she always maintains close communication with me. For example, I have a few cases of children with learning difficulties. She always asks if she can offer me any help and support. (078) (Teacher G)

I use the metaphor of “buffer” to describe this long-term harmonized relationship, as it functions to lessen the effect of the collision and the potential power struggle embedded in the centralization and decentralization dichotomy. As argued by Walker (2006: 1-2), “Leadership in East Asia is mediated by important cultural norms of high power, distance, a collectivist orientation, and hierarchical compliance.” Where the cultures “continue to place a premium on collectivism and group harmony, it is more accepting of societal and organizational power inequities”. Similarly, the school stakeholders in this study were quite satisfied with the present situation of power distribution. That is to say, the centralized power and authority held by a single head was uncritically accepted by the school stakeholders.

## Summary

The discourses of participation in decision-making and delegation of authority were operated differently in the two case study schools. Principal A extended a higher degree of delegation to her subordinates both devolving some authority and task responsibilities, while Principal B imposed more restriction on the exercise of authority embedded in the process of decision-making and delegation. On the whole, the delegation of the two principals, whether of authority or task responsibilities, was limited to the scope of curriculum and pedagogy. For parents, the boundaries of participation in decision-making were not as confined as those for the teachers, but still did not extend to the school policy level. In my analysis, the exercise of school leadership was largely centralized on the principal herself. The terms, headship and leadership, were quite often used as interchangeable concepts by the school stakeholders in this study. And yet, the school stakeholders uncritically accepted the centralized power and authority exercised by the school principals. I argue that the discourse of school leadership is different from the western notion of shared or distributed leadership displayed in the different aspects of school management. The dilemma between centralization and decentralization of leadership in the two schools will be discussed in Section 7.3. I will also put the discussion into a wider context to address the issue of decentralizing leadership that is important for the future development of preschool leadership in the local field.

## **6.4 Perspectives on Characteristics of Leadership Practice**

As mentioned in Chapter Two, there have been a variety of conceptual models proposed in the study of school leadership over the past few decades. These paradigms are instructional, transformational, moral, participative, managerial and contingency leadership. It is interesting to see how relevant these theories are in describing the leadership phenomena in the local preschool settings. Are there any similarities and differences in the characteristics of leadership practice in the case studies? As discussed earlier, the teachers, parents and support staff tended to perceive themselves as followers in the leadership process. Consequently, their perceptions of school leadership were largely grounded in the school principal's behaviour and functions and sometimes in those of the school governor.

Based on the descriptions given by the school principals and different stakeholders, I cluster the data on the characteristics of effective leadership into the patterns associated with three leadership roles. These three leadership roles are 'role model', 'school manager', and 'mentor for curriculum and pedagogy'. I will explain and discuss each of these roles in turn.

### **6.4.1 Role Model**

Huang (1988) argues that the Chinese culture and values have been quite consistent over the long run, despite some change over time. It is dominated by ethical humanism, and placed great value on people and their activities (Chan,

1963). It is quite common for school leaders to consider their social obligations in their practices (Wong, 2001) (see Section 2.1.2). The interview data in this study indicated that the school principals themselves and the other stakeholders regarded possessing high ethical standards and upholding professional values to be the important attributes of effective leadership.

Many of the school stakeholders had a consistent view of the importance of the role modelling demonstrated by the school principals. The following examples indicate what the school principals required themselves, and also what was expected by others to achieve a high ethical standard.

A principal is the role model in the school. For example, I ask my colleagues not to take leave in September [at the beginning of the school term]. I will not do that, even though I need to handle my family matters during that period of time. (118) (Principal A)

Teachers are required to dress properly and decently. Principal B is our role model. She and Governor B are the key persons of our school. They are our role models in every aspect. (084) (Teacher I)

Besides, being the role model for the school, the school principals were expected to have a strong commitment to higher professional values. Governor B told me that Principal B tried her best to uphold professional values against unreasonable parents.

Principal B explains patiently to the parents who make complaints about the school. She will not be dominated by the parents. She tries to uphold the professional values and beliefs. This is the way to gain respect from others. (060) (Governor B)

Teacher I mentioned that she would expect the school principal could uphold the professional values of child centeredness. She said the school management had its own standpoint. Even though some parents complained about that the workload for the children was insufficient, the school still insisted upon its homework policy. (032)

#### **6.4.2 School Manager**

As mentioned in Section 2.4.4, the structure of a preschool is very simple in general. Except for a small number of large preschools, the normal staff composition includes a school principal, a team of teaching staff and a small number of support staff. Some schools may have the post of senior teacher and some do not. Unlike primary and secondary schools, there is usually no middle management, such as a vice principal and subject panels, in the preschool settings. Typically, the school principals in this study had often to play the role of school manager. As was frequently mentioned by the school stakeholders, the principals made great efforts in the area of school operation including management of resources, giving directions and guidance on daily operation, allocating duties and workload, maintaining staff discipline, facilitating staff collaboration and teamwork, and staff supervision.

Regarding the management of resources, both principals made an effort to maximize the use of internal resources and solicit external support for school improvement. As mentioned previously, School B was located in private premises.



Management of physical resources was a priority for Principal B in the day-to-day operation of the school. Principal B explained in detail how she tried to make full use of the physical space in the school.

Physical space is the major constraint to our school. I have to make thoughtful plans on the use of space. For example, I carefully schedule the timetable for each class so as to make full use of every single space in the school. (066) (Principal B)

From the parents' perspective, Principal A could make good use of parental resources to support the school and teaching activities. Parent B told me that Principal A was familiar with the background of each parent and therefore can mobilize parents to contribute in school activities. For example, she invited one parent who had good proficiency in Putonghua to teach the subject. She also invited parents to be volunteers for organizing the school graduation ceremony. (025)

Giving guidance to staff on daily operations was another task that the school principals had to do everyday. They sometimes had to make "direct interventions" to ensure the smooth running of the schools. This reflected that the school principals were the down-to-earth people and also the dependency of their subordinates.

When there are any problems in daily operation, I will investigate the reason behind it. I remember that one day all the parents and children were stuck at the lift lobby at dismissal time. I found that the teacher did not know how to manage the flow of traffic. So, I asked the teacher should release those in a hurry to catch the school

bus first and then let those being picked up by parents go later on... Since I have to take care of the safety of the children, I carefully make plans on time management and routines. (154) (Principal B)

Apart from these instances, it seemed that the school principals understood that the staff relationship was a promoting factor for staff collaboration and teamwork. They would try their best to facilitate the relationship among staff. Teacher F said the expatriate teachers were not familiar with the class routines and the teaching approach. Principal B asked her and other teachers to help those teachers and make them feel included (040). The school principals would also discourage any gossip in the schools. Principal A said she would not get involved in any personal conflicts between staff. She usually gave space for them to resolve the conflict by themselves. This was the way to avoid micro-politics (092).

Apparently, the school stakeholders found their own principal was a caring and patient person on whom they could rely. At the same time, they also indicated that the principal could be very firm in staff supervision and staff discipline when necessary. Principal A said she directly pinpointed to her staff when they made mistakes in carrying out duties and responsibilities.

I usually give time for my staff to correct their mistakes. However, if there is no improvement, I will help them find out the problem. If it is something very important, I will tell him/her the possible consequences. For example, if the staff cannot meet a deadline, I will help prioritize the task for him/her. If the staff intends to do so, I will be very firm to force him/her to meet the deadline. (098) (Principal A)

One member of support staff said Principal A would give her an opportunity to improve her work. The only thing that she should keep in mind was to avoid repeating the same mistake again.

In fact, Principal A is very 'democratic'. When she finds something wrong, she directly pinpoints the problem to us. Then, we will have to pay special attention to that. (144) (Staff A)

The situation in School B was similar. In addition, Principal B also emphasized the importance of staff discipline, particularly in relation to professional image and teachers' behaviour. The following is the description made by Governor B on how firm Principal B was to maintain the staff discipline.

Our school is very traditional and conservative. Teachers are not allowed to dye their hair or to wear low-cut tops and dresses. Principal B is very firm on staff discipline. The teachers have to follow the rules. (104) (Governor B)

In mentioning the process of implementing change in Section 6.2.2, workload was always the concern of the staff members. The school governors and principals paid special attention to finding a balance between the additional workload created by the new change and the well-being of staff members.

Practically speaking, the workload of the teachers cannot be reduced but I will try my best to streamline their daily work. For example, I reschedule all meetings in the same week. This allows the teachers more time for preparation. And the arrangement is easier for them to take leave for attending a training course or handling personal matters if they need to do so. I also help prioritize the work for them in order to reduce the burden. All my staff are satisfied with the present arrangement. (112) (Principal A)

The teachers understood it was inevitable that the workload became heavier in the process of school improvement. They appreciated that the school management made an effort to relieve them of the burden.

Since the workload of class teachers is very heavy, Principal B asks the subject teachers to give them assistance. For example, they help out by filing the class documents. In addition, Principal B tries to figure out a more effective way to organize the children's portfolios. She knows that we are hard-working and she wants to relieve us of the burden. (098) (Teacher F)

#### **6.4.3 Mentor for Curriculum and Pedagogy**

In addition to playing the part of role model and school manager in the schools, the principals were also the mentor for curriculum and pedagogy. As mentioned in Section 5.2.3, most teachers had only obtained their professional qualification of one-year basic certificate and some of them had a higher diploma while the principals had received the training at degree level or higher. Naturally, the gap between the levels of professional qualification created a role demand on the school principals to act as a mentor for the teachers. They expected themselves/were expected to possess the vision to bring in new ideas and create new initiatives. They made ample preparation for school improvement by collecting the necessary information, making professional exchanges with other schools, and connecting with the external environment for the necessary expertise and knowledge. To help install the new changes, the school principals worked

closely with their teachers on designing the curriculum, planning lessons, doing class demonstrations, and giving feedback on teaching practice.

I spend time on helping my teachers to improve their practices. Sometimes, I apply what I learnt from the university in my school. When the teachers do not know how to practice the new skills, I will do class observation or class demonstration for them. I think this is the best way to give them support and help to improve their skills. (090) (Principal A)

In the first month of the new term, I ask the teachers of the K1 Class to make observations on the language development of the newly admitted children. They keep records of individual children who may have special problems. Then, I will do a follow-up to see if we can provide individual support for these children in the school or if we need to make a referral to other professional for support in the field, such as speech therapy. (098) (Principal B)

In return, the teachers expected the school principals to give guidance on curriculum design and feedback on the quality of teaching practice. Teacher B appreciated the efforts made by Principal A in this regard.

Our school principal gave us her opinions on developing the framework of learning portfolio used in the assessment. Taking this into consideration, we then decided to assess four aspects of the children's learning and development. When adopting this new approach, we needed to observe children's behaviour in the process of learning. However, we found that it was difficult to conduct regular observations in our daily practice. Regarding this, we consulted Principal A again. She gave us some useful suggestions on this matter. (090) (Teacher B)

Apart from the above, they also sought advice from the school principals on their daily practices. The following excerpt highlights this fact.

We are under the leadership of Principal B. When having the staff meeting, she can pinpoint our blind spots in our daily practice. She has received more professional training than us. I find that it is good to share her expertise and experience. (032) (Teacher F)

As mentioned in Section 5.2.3, all teachers in the two case study schools had obtained one year of full-time training. Supposedly, these teachers who were professionally trained could practice at a competent level. However, this was not exactly the real situation in the two schools. The school principals sometimes had to coach the teachers on their daily practice. The following quotes provide two perfect examples of this.

We have to submit the lesson plans and evaluation reports to Principal A for comments. She gives us a lot of support on teaching. When I have any difficulties in handling the children with emotional problems, I will seek help from her. (126) (Teacher E)

When Principal B finds that some teachers speak to the children in a rude manner, she will tell me. Then, I [as senior teacher] have to remind those teachers of this. Or, when Principal B observes that some teachers cannot use the appropriate teaching methods, she will also tell me. As I mentioned earlier, I have to remind those teachers of this. (074) (Teacher I)

## **Summary**

The school principals in this study tended to take up three major roles: role model, school manager, and mentor for curriculum and pedagogy. With reference to the leadership models discussed in Section 2.1.2, the characteristics of leadership practice in the two case study schools perceived by the school stakeholders were similar to those of moral, managerial and instructional leadership. To a certain

extent, the leadership exercised by the school principals also possessed some characteristics of transformational style. This refers to the focus of leadership on the higher levels of commitment and the capacities of organizational members. In contrast with this, the features of contingency leadership were not significantly reflected in the interview data. Since the two schools were under the umbrella of a medium to large organization, it was very likely that the parent organization had already handled the challenges of wide variations in the community and societal contexts. The school management was not so much required to respond to those problem-solving circumstances. However, in terms of power and authority, the leadership was centralized in the school management. This meant that there was very limited scope given by the school management to the teachers, support staff and parents to participate in decision-making. The leadership practice in the two schools is different from the Western notion of distributed leadership documented in the literature.

Walker (2004: 85-88) discusses the element of traditional Chinese culture within the deep leadership structure and its influence on people's thinking and behaviour. He argues that "Hong Kong principals practise a type of autocratic leadership underpinned by the traditional value of respect for authority and seniority... Shared leadership is difficult given the deep leadership structures in many schools". Similarly, this study revealed that there was a gap between the present form of centralized leadership and the conceptual model of shared and participative leadership mentioned in the literature. This finding was consistent with the perspectives of various stakeholder groups on the relationship between

the leaders and the led mentioned in Section 6.3. Therefore, I will also discuss the issue of decentralizing leadership in the local preschools in Section 7.3.



## **6.5 Conceptions of Effective Leadership and Management**

According to the definitions suggested by Runes (1984), conception, as a mode of cognition, “may or may not posit real or subsistent universals corresponding to the concepts of the mind”. Perception is “the apprehension of ordinary sense-objects, such as trees, houses, chairs, etc., on the occasion of sensory stimulation”. Theoretically, perception is distinguished from “higher ideational processes of imagination, remembrance, conception and reasoning”. In the previous section, I discussed the perceptions of the school stakeholders relating to the characteristics of leadership practice. In this section, I will explore their conceptions of effective leadership and management. Based on the definitions, I use ‘perceptions’ to refer to the present leadership practice perceived by the school stakeholders and ‘conceptions’ to refer to the ideal type of effective leadership preferred by them. By comparing the findings of two research themes, I try to locate whether there is a gap between the present practice and the ideal one. Lastly, I will provide an analysis of the metaphors used by informants to describe leadership to make a cross-reference to the narratives of the school stakeholders as an additional source for triangulation.

Before going into the following discussion, I must make a remark that there is a limitation to interpretations of the comparison of the findings of the two aforementioned research themes. In relation to the epistemological position, it is almost impossible to distinguish between the meanings of perception and conception. “The vehicle of perception consists of actually given sense qualities

supplemented by imaginatively supplied qualities which on the basis of earlier experience are ascribed to the perceived object.” (Runes, 1984) That means there was no clear-cut boundary between the conceptions and perceptions of leadership held by the informants in this study. In fact, the school stakeholders sometimes referred to what they perceived to be the leadership practice demonstrated by the school principals when talking about the conceptions of effective leadership and management in the interviews and often, *vice versa*.

#### **6.5.1 Effective Leadership**

The informants from the two case study schools generally thought that providing clear direction, managing the implementation of curriculum, relationships with staff and parents, and personal attributes were the essential elements of effective leadership. Comparatively, the school management of School A placed more emphasis on providing clear direction, while School B placed more emphasis on the importance of personal attributes. It might be due to the influence of the school management that many teachers and some parents of the two schools also shared the views of their own school principal and school governor in relation to those aspects of effective leadership.

Governor A said that a good leader should have a clear vision and mission, and should be able to provide direction and lead her subordinates to achieve the set goal. To a certain extent, this perspective was shared by Principal A. The following example is given to illustrate her point of view on effective leadership.

I foresee that the professional qualification of front-line teachers will be upgraded to the higher diploma level. If I push them to obtain the advanced professional training, I will get myself disliked. However, it will be much better if I persuade them personally and individually. It is important for a good leader to be humanistic. We are in the same team. Since I am in a senior post, I need to have the vision and mission. (138) (Principal A)

In School B, the school management thought that a good leader was the role model of his/her subordinates. Governor B said that a school principal should be hard-working and took good care of his/her staff. This was echoed by a parent in the school.

A school principal who is the senior in the school has to work hard to demonstrate her ability. A good leader should be a down-to-earth people and directly involve in the teaching practice and daily operation. This is to gain respect from his/her subordinates. (211) (Parent C)

### **6.5.2 Effective Management**

The informants of both schools conceived that management of resources and giving guidance on daily operations were the essential components of effective management. Some parents thought that providing opportunities for teachers to receive continuous professional development was part of the management of resources. Moreover, some parents stressed that good management was to utilize the space to provide a stimulating learning environment for the children. Governor A said that good management was to maximize the use of human and physical

resources for achieving the set goal. Principal A mentioned this point in more detail.

Effective management aims at ensuring the smooth running of the school system, such as budgeting, manpower allocation and filing. I need to provide my colleagues with a stable working condition. In fact, it is also conducive to effective leadership. (140) (Principal A)

Principal B added that the nature of effective management was to safeguard the smooth operation of the school system. She said that properly allocating the duties was the key to doing so. It was important to maintain an equal workload among staff. This was to ensure that everyone knew their own role and responsibilities to avoid confusion. It would minimize the potential problems that could occur in the process of working together. (154)

### **6.5.3 The Overlapping of Effective Leadership and Management**

To most of the school stakeholders, the definitions of effective leadership and management had overlapping meanings. For example, Teacher A said it was hard to distinguish between leadership and management. If the leadership was not effective, the school would not be successful even with good planning and management. This opinion reflected that the two interconnected concepts were equally important to the ideal type of leadership. The overlapping areas were allocation of duties and staff supervision. Principal A observed that allocation of duties was an important feature of effective leadership and management.

Practically speaking, it is difficult to maintain an absolutely equal workload among staff. Those who are more competent have to take up greater responsibility. But I still assign those who are less competent to take up some important duties. I try to be fair. (182)  
(Principal A)

The school stakeholders stated that staff supervision was the essential component of effective leadership and management. They thought that it was necessary for a school principal to be firm on staff discipline. Parent C emphasized that a good principal should maintain staff discipline, otherwise the school would become chaotic. Governor B also said,

A good principal should have high ethical standards. If she thinks it is good for the students and staff, she must be very firm to carry out the standard. For example, a good principal should tell her staff to behave properly, such as not leaning onto the door at the dismissal time. It is because it sets a bad example to the children. (130)  
(Governor B)

#### **6.5.4 Metaphorical Responses**

As mentioned in Section 3.6, metaphorical responses can be used to clarify the meanings of the narratives by comparing them to the perceptions and conceptions of leadership practice given by the school stakeholders. Therefore, I carried out an interpretation process in an interactive way with the data collected from the individual and group interviews. I listed the metaphorical responses of the school stakeholders in a table and interpreted the meanings to arrive at the next level of abstraction. The table of metaphors can be found in Appendix 6. When taking a closer look at the interview data, I discovered that the findings of metaphorical

responses were quite consistent with the multiple perceptions and conceptions of effective leadership held by the school stakeholders. Personal attributes were an element of role model; management of resources and giving guidance on daily operations, and relationships with staff were the components of school manager; and providing clear directions, and managing the process of curriculum implementation were the characteristics of mentor for curriculum and pedagogy.

Specifically, the patterns of the two case study schools were slightly different. The stakeholders of School A placed more emphasis on whether or not a leader could provide clear direction for future development, give practical advice on daily practice and maintain good teamwork among staff. On the other hand, though the views of the stakeholders of School B were somewhat mixed, they tended to place more stress on whether a leader could maintain staff discipline and possessed good personal attributes, such as being caring, open, trustful and selfless.

By making an inference inductively from the interview data, I can claim that the present leadership practice encountered by the school stakeholders in the case study schools was an effective model. However, it is unsatisfactory to arrive at firm conclusions on the basis of such analysis. Therefore, I raise a further question to understand the leadership phenomena: Why are the findings of the two research themes on perceptions and conceptions of effective leadership consistent with each other? There are three possible answers. First, it might be true that the school stakeholders regarded the present leadership practice as the ideal one. Second, as the schools were rated as excellent in the external validation exercises, the school

stakeholders might think it was the major contribution of the school principals. Under these circumstances, they would regard the present leadership practice as the ideal type. Third, the leadership practice witnessed by the school stakeholders in the case schools might be the only experience that they had of preschool leadership. That is to say, they did not have any previous experience of other, alternative models of leadership. Regarding this, I list the background information of the informants in the following:

**Table 6: No. of Preschool Served/Attended by Informants**

School A		School B	
School stakeholder	No. of preschool served/attended (excluding the present school)	School stakeholder	No. of preschool served/attended (excluding the present school)
School Governor A <sup>4</sup>	0	School Governor B <sup>5</sup>	0
School Principal A <sup>6</sup>	0	School Principal B	0
Teacher A	0	Teacher F	1
Teacher B	5 (2 in Organization A)	Teacher G	1
Teacher C	1 (in Organization A)	Teacher H	0
Teacher D	0	Teacher I	0
Teacher E	1 (in Organization A)	Teacher J	0
Staff A	0	Staff C	0
Staff B	0	Staff D	0
Parent A1	0	Parent C1	1
Parent A2	0	Parent C2	1
Parent A3	0	Parent C3	0
Parent A4	0	Parent C4	0

<sup>4</sup> Governor A had substantial experience of working as a front-line teacher and school principal in different schools. However, School A was the only school in which she served as school governor.

<sup>5</sup> Same case to Governor B

<sup>6</sup> Principal A had the experience of working as a front-line teacher in other school of Organization A. This was the only school in which she served as principal.

Parent A5	0	Parent D1	0
Parent B1	0	Parent D2	0
Parent B2	0	Parent D3	0
Parent B3	0	Parent D4	0
		Parent D5	0

According to the above information, most of the staff members only had the experience of serving in their present preschool, with the exception of three teachers in School A and two in School B. 15 parents out of 17 did not have any experience with other preschool leadership. In other words, the majority of the informants in this study had no experience of another alternative model of leadership. This might be one of the reasons why they would regard the present leadership practice as the ideal type. To sum up, the findings of the conceptions and perceptions of the school stakeholders were quite consistent in referring to role model, school manager, and mentor for curriculum and pedagogy as the roles of effective leadership in this study.

## Summary

As defined by the majority of school stakeholders, the concepts of effective leadership and management were interconnected. The concepts overlapped in some meanings, namely allocation of duties and staff supervision. For effective management, the school stakeholders conceived that the management of resources and the giving guidance on daily operation were the essential components. Meanwhile, they suggested that providing clear directions, managing the implementation of curriculum, relationships with staff and parents, and personal



attributes were the elements of effective leadership. The findings relating to the concepts of effective leadership were similar to those descriptions provided by the school stakeholders discussed in Section 6.4. In addition, the findings of the metaphorical responses were to a certain extent similar to those of the two themes mentioned above. Namely, personal attributes were an element of role model; management of resources and giving guidance on daily operations, and relationships with staff were the components of school manager; and providing clear directions, and managing the process of curriculum implementation were the characteristics of mentor for curriculum and pedagogy. Specifically, the stakeholders of School A placed more emphasis on whether or not a leader could provide clear directions for development, guide daily practice and maintain teamwork among staff. On the other hand, the stakeholders of School B tended to focus more on maintaining staff discipline and personal attributes.

Overall, the findings about the conceptions and perceptions of the school stakeholders on effective leadership were quite consistent with the metaphors used in the interviews. However, excessively rigid conclusions should not be drawn on the basis of such analysis for two reasons. Firstly, in relation to the epistemological position, it is almost impossible to distinguish between the meanings of perception and conception. Secondly, most of the informants in this study had no experience of other, alternative models of leadership and the two schools were rated as excellent in the quality assurance inspections. These informants would regard the leadership practice that they encountered in their

schools as the ideal type. Therefore, the findings of the characteristics of effective leadership could not be generalized beyond these case studies.

## **6.6 Concluding Remarks**

The overall aim of my study has been to investigate effective leadership in preschools from the perspectives held by school principals and different stakeholders within school contexts, and to identify the contextual factors influencing the leadership process and practice and programme quality. From the interview data, I found that the model of effective leadership for quality in the early childhood programmes (see Figure 3 in Chapter Four) was characterized by three roles: role model, school manager, and mentor for curriculum and pedagogy. The common definition of quality programmes given by the various stakeholder groups referred to its distinctive features and intimate staff-child relationship. For the parents, a quality programme also included two elements: the quality of total support given to children and families and the maintenance of close communication with parents.

There were a number of factors influencing leadership in the process of school improvement. They were the diversified challenges, including government policy, pressure from interfacing with primary education, keen competition among preschools in the local field, diversity of parental expectations, increased demand for accountability and physical constraints. While facing these challenges, both schools gained multilevel support from their own parent organization, school governor, sibling schools, their teaching team and parents.

In order to be more competitive in the educational marketplace, the two schools had initiated changes to the curriculum and pedagogy. They shared some similar experiences while other aspects of change were different. Both of them placed emphasis on maintaining close communication with the school governors and parents. They adopted a different approach in the management of change. One school sought a radical change in curriculum innovation through partnership with external consultants. In contrast with this, the other tended to follow the logic of a quick-fix approach that would get the teachers to change in certain specified ways with their knowledge enriched by outside experts from the local tertiary institutions, and then put their new capabilities into practice.

In the process of school improvement, one school principal extended a higher degree of delegation to her subordinates, devolving both some authority and some task responsibilities, while the other imposed more restrictions on the exercise of authority embedded in the process of decision-making and delegation. Generally speaking, the exercise of school leadership in the two case study schools was still largely in a centralized form. The terms 'headship' and 'leadership' were quite often used as interchangeable concepts by the school stakeholders. The discourse of school leadership revealed in this study is different from the western notion of shared or distributed leadership displayed in the different aspects of school management.

To conclude, the perceptions and conceptions of school leadership held by various stakeholder groups, together with the contextual factors of the two schools, were

the major sources shaping the leadership phenomenon, and its impacts on in-school processes and school outcomes in these case studies.

## **Chapter 7     Discussion**

### **7.1     Summary of Research Findings**

The previous chapter discussed themes relating to the multiplicity of the school stakeholders' perspectives on effective leadership in the preschool contexts. As set out in Chapter One, the fourth objective of this study is to identify the key tensions and dilemmas that impact on effective leadership of preschools in Hong Kong, drawing upon the data arising in this study and a review of the wider literature. In this section, I will summarize the major findings and discuss the conclusions drawn from the data analysis. I will then organize my comments in accordance with that objective. I will pinpoint how we can learn from the good practices of effective leadership demonstrated in the two case study schools. In addition, I will discuss in greater depth whether there is more that the local preschools can learn from their experiences and from the wider literature. There will be three focal points in my discussion: the demand for promoting moral leadership, the need for more distributed leadership and a greater focus on longer term sustainability.

As also mentioned in the first chapter, the practice of leadership and management is context-bound, and it is problematic to assume that policy and practice relating to local preschool education should be drawn from the knowledge base of other contexts (Bottery, 1992). Therefore, I will keep this in mind when discussing, in the following sections, how each of these concepts can serve as a point of reference for the local preschools when they reconsider their leadership practice.

The discussion will further enrich the understanding of effective leadership in preschool settings from a broader perspective.

Firstly, the findings did not reveal substantial differences between the various stakeholder groups on the definitions of a quality programme. The school governors, principals, teachers, members of support staff and parents all thought that a programme of high quality could support the all-round development of young children and provide various learning experiences based on their individual needs and interests. Besides, the informants generally valued the intimate staff-child relationship that existed in the institutions, the total support given to children and their families and the close communication with parents. In the interviews, parents placed relatively greater stress upon their views of learning attitudes and learning effectiveness. This suggested that the views of this stakeholder group on the quality in early childhood programmes has begun to shift from child rearing to developmental nurturing, but with an emphasis on academic learning. As mentioned in Section 6.2.1, the ability of the two schools in this study to manage the tension between learning through play and academic pressure was visible in the resolution of the conflict between the professional values and beliefs held by the educational practitioners and the demand for academic learning imposed by the parents. However, this raises the question of whether the provision of care and education in those preschools which cannot strike a good balance between the two ends is truly relevant and of a high quality. It may be that the leaders of some schools will be too inclined to follow the dictates of parental choice. I will address this important question in Section 7.2.

Secondly, one finding from this study is that there was general agreement about the roles of effective leadership perceived by the informants. They thought that the role model, the school manager, and the mentor for curriculum and pedagogy were the important roles for a school principal to play within the school context. The characteristics of leadership practice in the case study schools were similar to those of the models of moral, managerial and instructional leadership documented in the literature (see Table 1 in Chapter Two). More importantly, the interview data showed that the exercise of school leadership was largely centralized in a single headship. The teachers, parents and members of support staff quite often viewed themselves as followers. Generally speaking, the school stakeholders in this study were satisfied with the present situation of power distribution. The reason was that the relationship between the leader and the led was characterised by a mode of harmony that functioned to release the tension of the potential power struggle embedded in the centralization and decentralization dichotomy as mentioned in Sections 6.3 and 6.4. That is to say, the centralized power and authority held by a single head was uncritically accepted by the school stakeholders. The exercise of school leadership in the two case study schools was still largely in a centralized form. The discourse of school leadership revealed in this study was different from the western notion of shared or distributed leadership displayed in the different aspects of school management. However, if we take a closer look at the leadership practice of the two case study schools, the discourses of participation in decision-making and delegation of authority operated differently in the two settings. One leader extended a higher degree of delegation to her subordinates while the other



imposed more restriction on the exercise of authority embedded in the process of decision-making and delegation. I will put this discussion into a wider context to address the issue of distributed leadership in Section 7.3.

Thirdly, as mentioned in Section 6.2, the contextual factors impeding effective leadership in the process of school improvement included government policy, pressure from interfacing with primary education, keen competition among local preschools, diversity of parental expectations, increased demands for accountability and constraints imposed by the physical environment. Meanwhile, the factors promoting school success included the multilevel support from their own parent organization, school governor, sibling schools, the teaching team and parents. The narratives of the informants showed that the two schools shared some similar experiences in the process of school improvement but they adopted a different approach to the management of change. One school sought a radical change in curriculum innovations through partnership with external consultants, while the other tended to follow the logic of a quick-fix approach, without disturbing the formal structure of the school system. As indicated in the summary of Section 6.2, I will discuss the issue of sustainability of development in the schools in order to draw more general conclusions about the sustainable development of early childhood education in the local field in Section 7.4.

## **7.2 Working between Market Forces and Professional Values**

Market forces have become a significant influence in educational discourse in many Western countries over the past few decades (e.g. Gewirtz, 1995; Foskett, 1998; Levin, 2001). As all the local preschools are privately run, the form and structure of preschooling has been strongly shaped by market forces. Not surprisingly, by actively and proactively responding to parental choice, preschools put considerable effort into sharpening their competitive edge for survival in the education marketplace. My study can provide some evidence in this regard. The two case study schools had successfully gone through the external validation exercise. Receiving a good result in the quality assurance inspection was a trademark of achievement for the two schools. The two “excellent” schools gained the high ground, but they were still caught between the educational ideology of child centeredness and the demand of academic learning imposed by parents. The findings reflected that the two schools had to do their best to formulate strategies to work between professional values and parental preferences, and that they achieved this successfully. Drawing from their experiences, I have presented a detailed analysis which examines this phenomenon at a deeper level. But the examination of two case study schools which are clearly effective does not answer the question of how effective early childhood education is in those preschools that cannot make the two ends meet and are heavily inclined towards consumer choice, allowing market forces to shape the provision of schooling. It is an enormous challenge for preschool leaders to strike a good balance between professional

values and parental preferences while ensuring that the provision of care and education is truly relevant and of a high quality.

The study conducted by Dempster and his colleagues (2001) into the manifestation of new public management in education may shed some light on this question. They find that the increased competition inevitably exerts pressure on the schools to improve performance in a quasi-market environment. As a result, “this type of competition figures prominently in schooling, where reputation and perceptions of quality are important ingredients in choices made by parents” (p. 4). The two case study schools were not exactly illustrations of Depmster’s claim about school reputation and perception of quality in market competition, but they do have certain features that resemble that claim. To be more competitive in the educational marketplace, the two schools inevitably had to place emphasis on the importance of maintaining close communication with parents and giving proof of learning effectiveness as an indicator of school success. The educational phenomenon in a quasi-market environment has caused a good deal of comment. Meyer et al. (1992: 56) hold the view that “a school succeeds if everyone agrees that it is a school; it fails if no one believes that it is a school, regardless of its success in instruction and socialization”. This quote reminds us that the roles and functions of preschooling should be to contribute to the all-round development of young children. I am deeply concerned about the quality of programmes provided by those preschools that allocate an excessive and increasing amount of time and resources to courting parental support and involvement rather than improving the core domain of teaching. In such cases the work of preschools may become just a

piece of rhetoric and any claim of quality education is merely an illusion, castles in the air.

The above discussion leads me to explore a deeper meaning of the leadership phenomenon. Before going into a further discussion, I quote a few lines about the nature of market forces from a conference paper written by Robertson (1997: 3):

“It takes little effort to demonstrate that while the marketplace has been an exceedingly effective mechanism to generate wealth, on the whole, its success has been achieved because of, not despite its lack of a moral core. This is not a character flaw but a characteristic. Markets are not moral: they are necessarily preoccupied with self-interest and advantage and, as such, are unfit arbiters of what constitutes our collective well-being.”

One important finding in my study indicated that the two schools could uphold the professional values of “child-centredness” and “developmentally appropriate practice” against the demand for academic learning imposed by the parents, and were able to clarify their own core values when dealing with these conflicts. However, many preschools in the local field have been struggling very hard for survival in the battlefield of the education market. The statement “markets are not moral” arouses feelings of anxiety in me. I wonder whether some school leaders may surrender key values and professional integrity in the tide of market competition. They operate the schools as business enterprises and take parental choice as the infallible doctrine for school success. The impact of market forces strongly leads to the attitude of compliance to parental preference. I take the above theoretical argument against educational markets one step further. Is the moral core of professional values being pushed aside by the values of market competition?

This question suggests that there may be a negative impact on the ethical climate of schooling under the influence of market forces (Oplatka, 2004: 158). Therefore, any effort to improve the quality of early childhood education depends on an understanding of the dynamics of market forces and the self-reflective ability to clarify one's standards and values when dealing with conflicts. The local field is now facing the challenge which requires a careful re-examination of the moral core of school leadership. Convey (1992) proposes that some of the central ingredients behind effective leadership are authenticity, integrity and trust. All these can only take place within an ethical framework where ethics and values play a central role for school leadership (Brown and Townsend, 1997: 14). This argument is confirmed by the experiences of the two case study schools. The interview data clearly indicated that the school principals themselves and the other stakeholders regarded possessing high ethical standards and upholding professional values to be the most important attributes of effective leadership (see Section 6.4.1). Features of moral leadership were demonstrated in the narratives of the informants. My research also revealed that the two school principals needed to tread very carefully upon the ground they were walking on: the moral core of professional values and the invasion of market forces into education. I will further discuss this point and make a recommendation on the aspect of moral leadership in Section in 8.1.1.

### **7.3 Dilemma between Centralization and Decentralization of Leadership**

The introduction of *Performance Indicators* in 2000 imposed new demands for a change in leadership style. Over the years, to what extent has preschool leadership been reshaped to be a more decentralized form as prescribed by the policy document? Though the results of this study cannot be generalized for the whole picture of leadership phenomena in the local field, it probably shed some light on its latest development. The leadership style of one principal was in a centralized form with very limited scope for delegation and participation while the other principal exhibited a higher degree of delegation of authority and allowed her subordinates greater participation in decision-making. I argue, based on the limited evidence provided by the two case studies, that the development of preschool leadership is at the start of shifting towards the paradigm of decentralization. There may be some tensions that occur in the process of decentralizing and distributing leadership. In this section, I will discuss the potential tensions of such processes in the local preschools by making reference to the concept of decentralized centralism described by Karlsen (2000) in the literature review (see Section 2.1.2).

There are two points I should like to mention here. The first one concerns the mentality of the practicing principals. As mentioned in Section 2.4.3, the preschool teachers who received no professional preparation were practicing in the schools until the implementation of the pre-service training policy in 2003. Many of them might be originally “trained” in a modified form of apprenticeship. They tended to

follow the practices of the experienced members of staff they worked alongside. They were expected to give respect to the formal authority and not to challenge the power held by those in senior positions. That was the way they were “professionally” socialized. Some of these teachers have now become the school principals. I do not mean to make a stereotype of it but it is quite natural that these school principals may possess a mindset strongly fixated on the centralized style of leadership.

The second one concerns the capability of front-line teachers for taking up leading roles. Teachers generally perceive their roles and responsibilities to be only implementing the curriculum plan imposed by the school management. They seldom see the meaning of professionalism entailing a sense of self-direction, independence and autonomy (Freidson, 2001). Some teachers even show little enthusiasm for decision-making as such involvement may present new demands for them. Therefore, whether or not front-line teachers are willing to participate in decision-making and are capable of taking up management responsibility is a concern for many school principals. Having said that, research findings show that teachers in the successful schools are aware that they may take on certain leadership roles and share different aspects of school management (Fullan, 1993).

If there is a trend of development toward the decentralization of leadership, it is essential to define precisely what direction it should be in. Such clarification makes the useful point that the activity of decentralization can take place in the local preschool contexts. Currently, the notion of distributed leadership has

become increasingly popular in the field of leadership. As elaborated in Section 2.1.2, distributed leadership can take the form of spontaneous collaboration, role-sharing and institutionalized meanings of working together (Gronn 2002). A critique of distributed leadership points out that it can involve only a delegation of tasks by the leadership but without a shift of power. Woods (2004) delineates the distinctiveness of democratic leadership in comparison with distributed leadership. He states,

“Democratic leadership entails rights to meaningful participation and respect for and expectations toward everyone as ethical beings. Democracy thus pervades the structures, relationships and learning of educational institutions in ways that distributed leadership does not.” (p.4)

By comparing and contrasting the theoretical models with the current practice of leaders and leadership in this study, I can generate a question which is central to the future development of leadership: What form of school leadership are we seeking to establish to raise the quality of preschool education in Hong Kong? I argue that the ultimate goal should be the democratization of leadership if preschool teaching is taken as a type of professional practice that involves a great deal of autonomy and responsibility and education is essentially a moral enterprise. The ideology underlying the democratic movement is the idea of favouring social equality in decision making. I understand that there is a gap between the present practice of centralized leadership and the ideal type of the democratic model. Therefore, the immediate target should rest on the distributed type of leadership for building up both the capacity of the leader and the led. Preschool leaders and teachers in Hong Kong should admit that there are limitations involved in relying



on the single, “heroic” leader for the sustainable development of schools in the future. They should develop a positive attitude and the necessary skills for delegating tasks and responsibilities and *vice versa*. As a good start towards distributing leadership, preschool leaders need to involve their subordinates in the process of management in order to reform their ways of thinking and to heighten their awareness of their own capabilities in contributing to school improvement. I make the observation, which is in line with the findings of this study, that when one school principal attempted to delegate some authority and give the autonomy to her staff in the leadership process, her subordinates reciprocally found themselves taking up the leading role in the implementation of curriculum change (see Section 6.3.1).

How to achieve the democratic leadership is a challenge to the local field in the long run. Some may argue that the ethical commitment apparent in the model of democratic leadership sits uneasily with the ideology of marketization that is built on valuing and celebrating the market and serving its needs (Woods, 2002: 15). However, this argument only reflects a totally static point of view on the future development of leadership. As a result of the policy initiative to upgrade the qualifications of the preschool teaching force after 1997, the front-line practitioners became more aware of the real essence of care and education, and that led subtly to an evolution towards professionalism in the local field. It consists of the institutional, operational and personal changes that are gradually taking place in school contexts to improve the quality of education. In other words, the professionalization of early childhood education will produce a move towards a

better balance between professionalism and marketism that can pave the way for the development of democratic leadership in the future.

#### **7.4 School Excellence at Present and Sustainability in Future**

It has been a few decades since the terms “sustainability” and “sustainable development” came to prominence, when they were originally advanced in the World Commission on Environment and Development report, *Our Common Future* (1987). Recently, the terms have been put to use in the field of education. As many different definitions of the concept and various approaches exist, I draw on one promoted by Dovers and Handmer in 1992. They state,

“Sustainability refers to the ability of a human, natural or a mixed system to withstand or adapt to endogenous or exogenous change indefinitely...An approach moving towards sustainability, it is based on the abandoning the generally fruitless search for stable systems, toward evolving resilience systems of capable to adaptation. This might be termed as ‘proactive resilience’ as opposed to the more traditional ‘reactive resilience’.” (p. 275-276)

The notion of sustainability and the approach of proactive resilience inspire me to think over two questions. How do the case study schools sustain excellence in the increasingly complex and rapidly changing environment in the education market? Moreover, the principal plays a leading role in every aspect of school operation. How can the schools maintain sustainability if there is a change in headship? These two questions within the concept of sustainable development provide the imperatives for school action.

In this study, one principal exhibited some attributes of distributed leadership by delegating tasks and responsibilities and role-sharing with her subordinates while the other displayed a relatively high degree of centralization of power and

authority. Nevertheless, the school principals were almost the sole source of inspiration for school improvement. Hopkins and his colleagues (1994) describe this type of inspiration as dependent on a single individual's intellectual, emotional, and physical energy and imagination. They argue that this style of leadership severely constrains the improvement process. Under the circumstances of leading by singular leadership, the case study schools have to deal with the challenge of sustainable development in many different ways.

The literature on effective schools in the West indicates that promoting decentralized, democratic, and inclusive forms of leadership is often associated with school improvement (Grace, 1995). More currently, the proposition of "third age" improvement is proclaimed by Hopkins and Reynolds. They (2001: 459) argue that leadership in the new paradigm of school improvement should focus on the areas of context specificity, learning in classrooms and understanding the capacity for improvement. Echoed by Morrison (2002), the self-organizing schools of the future will require an increasing consciousness of the importance of capacity building. This includes not only staff development, but also the strategic organizational planning, as well as the use of external support agencies.

As mentioned earlier, the practice of leadership and management is context-bound, and it is problematic if the above-mentioned concepts for school improvement are directly transplanted in the local preschool contexts. Moreover, a useful approach for sustainable development is based on analysing the current situation of that

organization. Taking these two principles into consideration, I propose some guidelines on the new positioning framework in the section that follows.

The two case study schools have already engaged in the process of building up the capacity of the teaching team by encouraging continuous professional development and providing opportunities for some role-sharing activities. The schools may consider linking these activities closely to the strategic planning of organizational development through which the school determines its medium and long-term goals and then identifies the best approach for achieving those goals. This strategy provides teachers with opportunities to apply what they have gained from professional training on the one hand, and to understand and reason about the subject matter in relation to pedagogy in their own contexts of teaching on the other. More importantly, this can give the teachers a greater sense of ownership and contribute to the future development of the school. This is also an effective strategy of distributing leadership to the teachers by empowering their leading role at the front-line level. Certainly, the strategy has its own limitations. Whether it is feasible or not depends on successful negotiation between the school and the individual teacher in relation to future planning of development.

Regarding the use of external support, it is proposed that a further generator of capacity may be networks of schools. Veugelers and Zijlstra (2002: 165) consider collaboration of schools in networks to be an important means for not only disseminating good practice, but also overcoming the traditional isolation of schools. However, this idea may not be workable in the market-driven nature of

the local preschool field. The fact is that preschools are in competition with each other for student recruitment. It is not feasible for them to work closely together on school innovations. Therefore, the inter-organizational level of support I mention here refers to different forms of collaboration, linkages and partnership with local agencies and universities.

The strategic alignment of external support from a central agency and partnership with higher education institutions are the most important factors contributing to school improvement (Hargreaves and Hopkins, 1991). At present, the EMB tends to use external pressure, in the form of policy mandates and snapshot inspections, as the major strategy for improving the quality of preschool education. Taking another perspective, the EMB should also take on a more active role of school-based support by providing the necessary knowledge of curriculum and teaching strategies, effective staff development and support for development planning. Moreover, support from higher education in Hong Kong still mainly consists of the provision of training courses and workshops. This type of support can no longer adequately meet the changing needs in the practical context as changes in schools and the teaching profession become more sophisticated. In my view, more school-based training and support services should be provided in order to continue the professional development of teachers at school level (Ho, 2005). From a wider perspective, the sustainable development of individual schools is part of the sustainable development of the field of early childhood education in Hong Kong.

## **Chapter 8      Conclusion and Implications of the Study**

In the first chapter I highlighted the fact that, as relatively little is known about leadership and management in the local context, the policy and practice of preschool education is largely based on the research and literature on primary and secondary education or follows the trends in many Western developed countries. In view of this fact, my research deals with a previously neglected area, namely effective preschool leadership with a focus on the alternative perspectives held by different school stakeholders involved in the quality process. It develops new, locally relevant, theoretical insights into the richness of the leadership phenomenon in the new era of change, and it seeks to explore the relevance of western leadership theory for Hong Kong preschools. The use of case study methodology in this study is innovative in the sense that this research strategy locates the leadership practice at different levels of operation and analyzes contextual conditions in relation to the preschool settings. It is also original in terms of my analysis and findings relating to the tensions and dilemmas facing preschool leaders in the educational marketplace as well as my discussion on the implications for the future development of preschool leadership in Hong Kong.

In the following sections, I discuss the implications of this study for professional development, leadership practice and government support. These implications are based on the arguments set out in Chapter Seven. Then, I will explore some areas for further research that would build upon the foundations set by the present study.

The conclusion that advocacy leadership is a possible development for future leadership will be discussed in the last section of this chapter.



## **8.1 Implications for Professional Development**

### **8.1.1 Developing Critical Self-reflective Ability through the Valuation Process**

The road to the democratization of leadership in local preschools is challenging. Democratic leadership processes are desirable for schools because they reflect socially mandated, ethical commitments to a collective process (Begley, 2001). Currently, it is proposed that democratic leadership should be grounded in the valuation process that captures the full range of human actions, in addition to showing the relationship with social ethics (Begley and Zaretsky, 2004: 640). “It focuses attention on a re-examination of the values of the profession, organization, community and society”. In my view, the valuation process as a concept for leadership preparation in the local field should be highly valued. This process could impart the basic tenets and values to practicing and future principals, and allow them to become more self-knowledgeable and self-reflective about the relationships between their thoughts, practices, attitudes and values. With reference to the broader environmental context, school principals can also reflect on the appropriateness of their own actions in relation to the potentially competing or incompatible values in the community and society. Whether it is taught as a subject or is integrated with other subjects, this component should be further strengthened in the existing pre-service and in-service programmes for professional development. Although it cannot serve as a guarantee to ensure that leadership practice is grounded in the moral core of professional values, the practicing and future principals at least will be more self-critical to their own

choices when they are at the cross-roads of the market forces and moral functions of preschooling.

### **8.1.2 Adopting Action Research for Leadership Preparation**

In response to the discussion of the moral dilemmas encountered by the school principals in the previous section, I propose that the strategy of action research be adopted for leadership preparation. This idea is inspired by Scribner and Bredeson (1997: 230). The two researchers used field-based action research to enhance programme quality and improve administrator preparation. In addition, I propose that one more feature be added, namely it be used as a means to build up the capacity of the teaching team in the school. I explain the three interlinked concepts of the action research strategy in the following section.

In the first place, action research involves initiating some actions in one's practice and then systematically analyzing the processes and outcomes of that practice. It recognizes the importance of the practitioner's experiential knowledge and allows practitioners to accept a broader interpretation of their functions and the knowledge base in which practice is grounded (Carr and Kemmis, 1986). The strategy of using action research provides an opportunity for the practicing and future principals to evaluate the realities of their own leadership strategies and experiences when compared with leadership theories. The process of action research enables them to locate the gap between theories and practices. It builds up their capacity to develop solutions to their own problems.

Second, if the practicing and future principals are equipped with the knowledge and skills of doing action research, they can adopt this strategy in their schools to develop the capacity of their teachers to play a leading role in the area of curriculum and pedagogy. Emihovich and Battaglia (2000: 225) examine the role of school leadership in creating and supporting the professional development of teachers in schools. They suggest that one way for leaders to build up the capacity of teachers may be for them to take part in the process to promote and contribute to a collective understanding of collaborative inquiry. I think this strategy will not only build up the capacity of individual teachers, but that it will also promote the collaborative culture of a school, an essential element for school improvement.

Third, preschool education is an emerging profession in the local field. One aspect of professionalism depends upon the capabilities of preschool teachers to use action research to analyze systematically the teaching processes and outcomes and to demonstrate the quality of their practice to the general public (Ho, 2006). If preschool teachers adopt action research in their teaching, it will provide a better basis for them to advance their practices. It also allows them to gather the evidence of children's learning through research-based practice in order to answer the parents' queries on learning effectiveness in a more concrete and professional manner.

### **8.1.3 Imparting the Knowledge and Skills of Systemic Leadership**

Shifts in education are creating a transition from traditional models of leadership to a more decentralized form. At the start of decentralizing leadership, school principals should consider involving teachers in a non-hierarchical network of collaboration, role-sharing and teamwork in different aspects of school operation (Hatcher, 2005). In the meantime, school principals should also keep in mind that it would be chaotic if members of an organization all lead at the same time and collectively participate in every decision. In relation to this, Collier and Esteban (2000: 209) think of systemic leadership “as analogous to lightening which moves across the organizational landscape, touching different people and energizing them at different times”. If decentralizing leadership is the future trend of practice, now is the time to equip the practicing and future principals with the necessary concepts and skills.

I think the basic skills of systemic leadership should start with involving principals in how to plan, organize, assign and control the processes of strategic human resources management. I would suggest that the component of personnel management in existing training programmes cannot fully address the complexity of school management in the local field. Therefore, the concept of strategic human resources management should be added to replace the traditional model of personnel management. The new concept has an emphasis on linking the management strategy with the long-range direction and development of a school (Armstrong, 2001). To achieve this goal, school principals should possess the

knowledge and skills in staff assessment, such as the identification of the basic skills required to perform assigned tasks, individual preferences and the potential for growth. Such preparation should be provided as part of continuous professional development so that the decentralizing process can be more effective.

## **8.2 Implications for Leadership Practice**

### **8.2.1 Promoting Teacher Leadership in Schools**

Recently, school stakeholders have become more active in the process of school operation at many levels. The single charismatic leadership no longer fits with the requirements of accelerated change and increasing complexity in educational contexts. In relation to this, I have noted in Section 7.3 that, as a good start towards distributing leadership, school principals have to involve teachers as part of a collaborative network to develop their leadership role in the area of curriculum and pedagogy. There is one important implication for leadership practice: the process of staff collaboration and the development of teacher leadership is not just an exercise of redistributing the work and restructuring the school organization. If the practicing and future principals approach the task in that way, it would lead to negatively contrived collegiality, a dead end for school improvement. Contrived collegiality is characterized by a set of formal, specific, bureaucratic procedures to increase forms of working together. It has both positive and negative possibilities depending on whether it is administratively imposed or supportively facilitated (Fullan and Hargreaves, 1996). If the participatory process is imposed, teachers may display less enthusiastic attitudes. On the contrary, if it is supportively facilitated, teachers may be more willing to take up the leading role.

Regarding this, Frost and Harris (2003: 487) examine in detail a possible framework of factors affecting teacher leadership. The factors include the

construction of the professional role of teachers, the organizational environment and personal capacity. I share the views of those two scholars that attention must be paid to those factors in achieving teacher leadership. More importantly, I would argue that empowerment displayed in leadership practice is a key in the development of teacher leadership in the local preschool context. Empowerment is a complex, multidimensional concept that has elements in common with such concepts as self-esteem and self-efficacy. As described by Miller and Miller (2001: 182), “Empowerment may be defined as self-direction, allowing teachers to take responsibility and authority for decisions that affect them.” In traditional patterns of leadership, the local front-line teachers generally have a rather weak professional identity and lack of confidence in taking up greater responsibility for leading. Kouzes and Posner (1995: 185) connect empowerment to enactment that “leaders should take the power that flows to them and connect it to others, becoming power generators from which others draw energy”. Therefore, repeated affirmation and empowerment from the school principals is crucial for the teachers to gain such confidence to exercise the role of teacher leadership and be more actively involved in decision-making.

### **8.2.2 Reformulating Strategies for Parent Education**

Broadfoot (1990) states that parental involvement may well improve confidence in school achievement. This statement is most significant given the market-driven nature of the local preschool field where parental preference is a top priority. The choices of programme made by the parents may be purely based on school

reputation and perception of quality. In my view, preschool principals should have the ultimate responsibility for enabling parents to make “well-informed choices” for their children. I define the term “well-informed choice” as being where parents know the real essence of care and education for the all-round development of their children. Only if parents know the core values of preschooling can they make the choice based on the quality of the programme. Fundamentally, effective parent education is a better way to reconcile the difference between the market forces and professional values.

Supported by the findings in this study, my long-term observation is that preschools frequently spend time on educating parents by inviting outside experts from the local tertiary institutions to deliver talks on child development and child rearing practices. This type of parent education is quite superficial. The National Parenting Education Network in the United States (2006) defines parent education as a “process that involves the expansion of insights, understanding and attitudes and the acquisition of knowledge and skills about the development of both parents and their children and the relationship between them.” To promote the benefits of parent education, the schools should directly involve parents in the process of education. Campbell and Palm (2004: 17) recommend that the effective approach of parent education should take place in a group with other parents under the supervision of highly trained staff. Principals of the local preschools have to rethink the effectiveness of the existing model of parent education. They should reformulate their practices to conform to a more comprehensive model. The new practices should allow parents, with facilitation from trained staff, to see the



connection between the provision of care and education in school and their own child-rearing practices at home.

### **8.3 Implications for Government Support**

#### **8.3.1 Extending School-based Development Support to the Pre-primary Sector**

To achieve the aim of the education reform of 2000, the local government introduced the school-based support services a few years ago. This is to equip school principals and teachers so that they can take on the changes in their workplaces. The scheme of the services basically consists of four components: the school-based professional support programme, language learning support services, and school-based curriculum development for secondary schools and for primary schools (EMB, 2006a). When we take a closer look at these services, the EMB has provided a very limited range of support to preschools, mainly through seminars and workshops. Moreover, there has been relatively little support for preschools in the area of school-based curriculum development. As announced in the *2006-07 Policy Address*, the local government has decided to set up a pre-primary education support team to provide on-site support on curriculum development and education strategy (Hong Kong Government, 2006: 15). The model of school-based curriculum development is to integrate the teaching-learning-assessment cycle with context specificity of the school in order to enhance the leadership role of teachers and school principal. This type of support is important for the development of preschools given the fact that the professional qualifications of the preschool teachers is minimal and basic. More importantly, when developing the model of school-based support for the local preschools, the EMB should pay special attention to the characteristics of the pre-primary sector, such as diversity

of individual school settings, keen competition among schools and the market-driven nature of the education service. Obviously, the sustainable development of the field cannot rely solely on the efforts of individual preschools. In this respect, the EMB should carefully lay out the support for school-based curriculum development for preschools, in order to build up the organizational capacity of the local preschools.

### **8.3.2 Promoting Partnership between Preschools and Higher Education Institutions**

In the recent years, the EMB has taken the initiative to promote partnership between the local schools and higher education institutions. Through the scheme of university-school support programmes, services are hired from universities and other institutions to provide support to individual schools on quality improvement (EMB, 2006b). Three school improvement projects have been launched so far. Two of them were undertaken by the Chinese University of Hong Kong and one by the Hong Kong Institute of Education. However, no preschools are involved in these three projects. I argue that the EMB should hire services from the local universities to provide help for preschools. The support of tertiary education institutions is important for advancing the quality of leadership and teaching in preschools from a research-based approach. This would enable the front-line practitioners to become more aware of the complexity of leadership and teaching practice in the process of school improvement and inform their efforts to improve the quality of practice in a systemic way.

### 8.3.3 Smoothing the Transition from Pre-primary to Primary Education

My study reflected the fact that parental demand for academic learning was a significant factor influencing leadership practice. Preschools generally have to work hard to reconcile the parental preference and professional values. It seems that the EMB has recognized the manifestation of these two contradictory forces on the provision of preschooling. It issued *Transition from Kindergarten to Primary Education* in 1999 in order to provide schools with suggestions of practical measures for orientating kindergarten children entering primary schools. However, primary schools and preschools are under no obligation to follow those recommendations. Therefore, the EMB should make more effort on this area. I recommend two approaches to smoothing the transition from pre-primary to primary education. First, the related measures should be laid down in the quality assurance inspection handbooks for both preschools and primary schools. This would be a more effective way to enforce the measures for smooth transition in order to ensure that children move with little difficulty from the pre-primary phase to the primary phase. However, a measure that was restricted to a top-down directive imposed by the EMB cannot fundamentally resolve the problem. As argued by Fullan (2001: 222), “In any cases, in complex systems heavy-handed accountability schemes never work because they cannot cause the beliefs and behaviors necessary for success.” Therefore, the role of government is to foster policy initiatives by listening to the voices of the stakeholders and facilitating dialogue among these stakeholders at the local level. Taking this point of view into account, my second recommendation is that the EMB should be more active in

fostering an open dialogue with and among the leaders of the pre-primary and primary sectors on the issue of transition. The ultimate goal of this approach would be to enable the two sectors to reach a common understanding of the importance of smooth transition for the well-being of young children. Only under these circumstances would it be possible to tackle the root of the problems which arise from the absence of a smooth transition.

## **8.4 Implications for Theoretical Literature and Further Research**

My study has provided a rich, contextualized analysis of effective leadership for quality early childhood programmes in two case studies. Building upon the foundations set by this study, I recommend the exploration of the characteristics of leadership practice in different preschool settings. As mentioned in Section 2.4.4, the preschools in Hong Kong are heterogeneous in terms of background, educational ideology, operation, size, staffing, staff qualifications, and the needs of clients. Further research into the area of school management should be conducted in order to map out a complete picture of leadership phenomena in the local field of early childhood education. Furthermore, from a global perspective, it would also be valuable to conduct comparative studies to compare and contrast the leadership discourse and practice in the local preschool settings with those in different parts of the world. The purpose of making such comparisons is to seek to understand the processes and outcomes of education in the local setting by increasing our understanding of other contexts. I will explore some of the implications for further research in the local and global contexts in turn below.

### **8.4.1 Exploring Preschool Leadership in Different School Settings**

There are several types of preschools that are worth investigating. First of all, the leadership practice in those schools graded as “good”, “acceptable” and “unsatisfactory” in the quality assurance inspections may be different from the two

case study schools which are graded as “excellent”. Furthermore, profit-making preschools, or those operated independently, may encounter some different contextual factors that need to be examined. Finally, the leadership characteristics and their impact on programme quality may be different for those schools headed by less experienced or less qualified principals. The purpose of conducting studies on these schools would be to identify any other leadership characteristics and influencing factors which are not exhibited in this study and to understand how school leadership is manifested in relation to different contextual factors. All the similarities and differences displayed in the leadership practice in different school settings can enable us to fine tune the conceptual framework of effective leadership.

#### **8.4.2 Developing Models of Effective Leadership through Confirmatory Research**

This qualitative study is the first of its kind to attempt to understand the characteristics of leadership in the local settings of a sample of Hong Kong preschools. The understanding of the leadership phenomenon generated from my study is not sufficient to form conjectures about the relationship between the characteristics of effective leadership for quality programmes across different preschool settings. This study is exploratory in nature but it can provide a hypothetical ground for further research which is confirmatory in nature. Confirmatory research tends to be theoretically based and focused on testing a set of variables and their relationships (Hair et al., 1995). In addition, as argued by Gall and Borg (1999: 54), “A true relationship should emerge regardless of the

measures and methods used as long as they are reasonably valid and appropriate. Thus, a very useful form of replication is to repeat important studies using different methodology.” Therefore, it would be worthwhile to conduct a quantitative, confirmatory type of research to examine the validity of my conceptual model of effective leadership. It could provide a very valuable tool for determining the degree to which the findings of this study can be generalized across different preschool settings. This will capture a fuller picture of leadership phenomena in the local field. Clearly, the more broadly we can apply a research finding to educational practice, the more valuable that finding will be.

#### **8.4.3 Identifying Comparative Indicators of Leadership Practice across the Pre-primary and Primary Sectors**

As recommended in the previous section, the local government should enforce the measures for the smooth transition between pre-primary and primary education. However, relying exclusively on the external efforts of quality assurance inspection cannot completely solve the day-to-day practical problems of transition. Further research is required to identify comparable indicators of effective leadership practice, processes, outcomes and the contexts of primary and preschool schools. Research on the development of leadership theory in cross-sector settings can identify whether there are any areas of leadership practice for enhancing the smooth transition from the pre-primary to the primary phase. Such information would begin to create a more solid basis for improving the collaboration between the teams now working on similar problems but in the two different educational sectors. Only then can we identify substantial practice for alleviating the barriers



to transition as well as for formulating strategies that can promote the quality of early childhood education in Hong Kong in a wider context of the education system.

#### **8.4.4 Understanding the Local Preschool Leadership through the Lens of Comparative Studies**

Much of the literature on globalization and education, for example the recent work by Chan and Mok (2001), Bray and Gui (2001), Tikly et al. (2003) and Crossley and Watson (2003), has shown that there are major problems in any uncritical transfer of educational policy and practice from one sociocultural context to another. The import of policy and practice raises important questions about their compatibility with indigenous cultures. To address the issues of compatibility, comparative studies aim to create a context-relevant knowledge base which relates to the implications for education policy and practice of globalization in different contexts. These arguments prompt me to further reflect on understanding local preschool leadership and enhancing its effectiveness through the work of comparative studies. My research revealed that effective leadership in two case study schools was characterized by how well the school principals managed the tension between learning through play and academic pressure as the resolution of the conflict between the professional values and market forces, and how well the principals exercised leadership in a predominantly centralized form to successfully lead their followers in the process of school improvement. These findings indicated that there was a considerable gap between local preschool leadership and the form of participative and decentralized leadership documented in the Western

literature. These theoretical insights into the specificity of the leadership processes in the Hong Kong preschool context provide a foundation for comparative studies. As a starting point for connecting the intellectual contribution of my study with the work of local comparativists, I propose to conduct research by drawing on and extending the work of Dimmock and Walker. These two scholars (1998) demonstrated that management and leadership in primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong shared some similarities with other East Asian countries, such as Singapore, Taiwan, Malaysia and Thailand, in terms of Hofstede's four cultural dimensions (see Section 2.1.2) and they also argued that more attention should be paid to the cultural matching of education policy and practice imported from the West. Conducting comparative studies on the above-mentioned themes in the local preschool settings is capable of generating international insights and comparisons which can support leadership practice. By identifying, exploring and explaining similarities and differences in educational discourse and practice across different cultures, we can better understand what is common to leadership phenomena, and distinguish it from what is unique, and select what is appropriate for the Hong Kong preschool context. This is one way of taking account of the global context which is sensitive to the local context of leadership practice. Hence, research of this type can contribute to local knowledge of a highly market-driven, non-Western context in the current debates about leadership theories. It also offers a window of opportunity for cross-cultural understanding and dialogue that is crucial in the age of globalization.

## 8.5 Conclusion

In concluding this study, I understand that it is a first step towards conceptualizing effective leadership in the preschool settings. Although it is a small-scale research study, the findings generated from the interviews and the conclusions drawn from the data analysis have shed some light on the discourses of leadership practice about programme quality and school improvement, and reflected the dilemmas on value conflicts, leadership paradoxes and the sustainability of school development. Preschool principals should be more aware of how their leadership practices are manifested by these contradictory forces.

In my view, becoming more critically self-reflective on one's professional practice does not on its own provide a proactive basis to respond to the changing circumstances in the local field. It is not enough to satisfy the requirements of fully-fledged school leadership. I argue that the best way to view the future development of preschool leadership is through the lens of professionalism. "Profession" refers to someone's work as being essential to the functioning of a society; thus the absence of this person's knowledge and techniques would weaken the society in some way (Becker, 1962). As defined by Becker, the leadership position not only entails dealing with planning, managing and leading processes in school, but also social responsibility for advocating policy and practice for the betterment of care and education of young children at community and societal level.

Imparting the advanced knowledge and competence of the practicing and future principals can only resolve part of the burning issue at a practical level. More fundamentally, attention should be paid to strengthening the collective effort of front-line practitioners to further the policy agenda of early childhood education in Hong Kong. This would definitely help to shape the social and political environment more favourably and in a manner conducive to the educational ideology of child-centeredness and the practice of developmental appropriateness.

Taba et al. (1999: 173) state,

“Early childhood practitioners traditionally are reticent when it comes to advocating for the importance of this important period. Practitioners tend to be nurturers, secure with the classrooms, and are decidedly with the majority. These are the traits which are congruent with assisting children to learn, grow, and develop, but incongruent with child advocacy. What’s needed for child advocacy are risk takers who can function as independent movers in unfamiliar environment; they are decidedly in the minority.”

The above quote highlights the fact that early childhood practitioners tend to be less vocal in expressing their opinions on public policy. The same is true in the local field. Therefore, advocating policy and practice creates an arena where the preschool leaders have to re-examine their own roles in the context of professionalism. They are required to play a strong social and political role creating a long-term vision of the future of early childhood education. This involves a good understanding of the field, legislative processes and the media, as well as being a skilled communicator (Kagan and Hallmark, 2001). This is going to produce a totally new demand for the preschool leaders in the local field who

generally interpret their role as being a policy implementer which, consequently, makes it difficult for them to move into the unfamiliar sphere of policy debate. With the provision of professional training at postgraduate level, more preschool leaders, though it is a very small number of them at the present time, have been better equipped. There is no excuse for their lack of involvement in policy formulation. Given the current high profile of the local field in government policy and in public debate, it is of the utmost importance for the preschool leaders to rethink their advocacy role for the future development of early childhood education in Hong Kong.

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**Consent Form**  
**(English version)**

Dear (Name of participant),

I am a Lecturer of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University and currently a graduate student studying at the University of Bristol, United Kingdom, and working on my doctoral dissertation. My area of study is Quality and Management of Early Childhood Education Programmes in Hong Kong.

The care and education services provided by preschools help to foster children's all-round development and lay the foundation for future education. Early experiences during this period will have an important effect on the subsequent development of the child. In recent years, preschools have been challenged continuously with the flux of educational reform and social change. The need to identify relevant strategies for continuously improving the quality of early childhood education seems more pressing than ever before. The results and findings of this study can be considered as the knowledge-base for professional development.

I would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank you for participating in this study. To protect each participant's anonymity, every effort will be made to maintain confidentiality. The information I collect in the interviews will be useful in helping me to write up my dissertation. I may quote some of your conversations in the report. There is also a possibility that some findings of this study will be published in international journals.

Your participation in this interview is on an entirely voluntary basis. You may at any time stop or even withdraw from the interview. The whole interview process will be audio-taped, and then be transcribed by my assistant. All the information will be kept strictly confidential and only I and my assistant will listen to the whole tape. Codes will be used to replace names, places and other identifiable characteristics. Pseudonyms will be used in the dissertation report and all published papers.

In signing this form, you have given me your consent for the interview, and herewith will not hold me responsible for anything relating to the interview.

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I have heard or read the information stated in the above Consent Form. I hereby give my consent to participate in the interview.

---

Signature of interviewee:  
Contact no.:

---

Name of interviewee:  
Date:

**Consent Form**  
**(Chinese version)**

受訪者姓名:

本人何彩華，為香港理工大學講師，並為英國布里斯托大學之研究院學生。現正進行博士論文研究，有關範圍是香港學前教育管理與質素。

香港學前機構提供教育與照顧的服務，為幼兒的全面發展及未來學習和成長奠定重要的基礎。在近年來，社會變遷和教育改革，學前機構面對不同的挑戰，找出有效的策略，使有關機構能不斷改善和提昇服務的質素是刻不容緩。本研究的目的是探討學前機構質素與管理的現況與問題，期望研究的結果有助學前教育的專業訓練和發展。

本人衷心感謝台端撥冗參與是次研究，你的個人資料將絕對保密。所得的資料將會用於撰寫論文，其中你講述的部份可能會記錄於論文內。若有機會的話，亦會刊登於國際論文上。但這次訪問是純出於自願性質，在過程中，你可有權隨時終止，訪問將會被錄音，然後轉為文字。一切資料會被保密，只有我本人及紀錄員才有機會聽到錄音帶原文，而所有文字紀錄將不會顯示你的全名。若你願意簽署這份表格，表示你同意接受此訪問，並不會於日後追究責任。

---

本人已閱讀或聽取上述同意書，現同意接受訪問。

---

受訪者簽署

---

受訪者姓名

聯絡電話:

日期:

問卷 Fact-finding Questionnaire (for preschool governors)

多謝參與本研究，你的個人資料將絕對保密。

Thank you for participating in this study. Every effort will be taken to maintain confidentiality to protect each participant's anonymity.

請以√代表你的選擇。

(Please tick √ the most appropriate choice.)

1. 個人資料

Personal Particulars

1.1 姓名 Name \_\_\_\_\_

1.2 性別 Sex \_\_\_\_\_

1.3 年齡 Age

☐ 30 以下 below 30

☐ 30-39

☐ 40-49

☐ 50-59

☐ 60 and above 以上

1.4 在本幼稚園/幼兒中心擔任校監年數 No. of years as the governor in the present school \_\_\_\_\_

1.5 擔任幼稚園/幼兒中心校監總共年數(包括本校) Total no. of years kindergarten principal/nursery supervisor (including the present school)

\_\_\_\_\_

1.6 擔任幼稚園/幼兒中心校監的學校數目(包括本校) No. of schools in which you have acted as school governor (including the present school)

\_\_\_\_\_

1.7 我的最高學歷 My highest educational level

- ☐ 研究院程度 Postgraduate Level
  - ☐ 大專/大學程度 Tertiary Level
  - ☐ 中學程度 Secondary Level
  - ☐ 小學程度 Primary Level
  - ☐ 其他，請註明 Others, please state
- 

多謝你填寫本問卷，請攜同問卷出席有關之訪問。

**Thank you for taking time to fill in this questionnaire and consent form.  
Please bring the completed questionnaire and form to the interview.**



## 問卷 Fact-finding Questionnaire (for preschool principals)

多謝參與本研究，你的個人資料將絕對保密。

Thank you for participating in this study. Every effort will be taken to maintain confidentiality to protect each participant's anonymity.

請填寫以下表格

Please fill in the table.

1. 學校資料  
School Information

學校名稱

地址  
Address :

電話 Tel : 傳真 Fax :

學校資料 School Information		教學人員資歷及人數(包括幼稚園校長/幼兒中心主任) No. & Qualification of Teaching Staff (Principal/Supervisor included)	
學校類別 School Category	非牟利 Non-profit-making	學士學位(幼兒教育) Bachelor Degree in Education (Early Childhood Education)	
學生性別 Student Category	男女 Co-educational	幼稚園教育證書/同等學歷 Certificate of Education/ Higher Diploma /Advanced Diploma (Early Childhood Education)	
參加幼稚園資助計劃 Joining Kindergarten Subsidy Scheme	:	合格幼稚園教師/註冊幼兒工作員 Qualified KG Teacher/Registered CCW	
註冊課室數目 No. of Registered Classroom	:	其他師資訓練 Other Teaching Trainings	
		合格助理幼稚園教師 Qualified Assistant KG Teacher	
		其他 Others (Please specify)	

本學年開辦班數(2005 年 9 月資料)

Classes in operation in this school year (data as at September 2005)

		幼兒班 Class (2-3)	幼兒班 Class (3-4)	幼兒班 Class (4-5)	幼兒班 Class (5-6)	總數 Total
上午班 AM	班數 No. of classes					
	就讀學生人數 No. of students					
下午班 PM	班數 No. of classes					
	就讀學生人數 No. of students					
全日班 Whole	班數 No. of classes					

\*採用全日及半日班混合上課制

\* Mixed-mode has been adopted in am and whole day classes

School Fees		幼兒班 Class (2-3 歲)		幼兒班 Class (3-4 歲)		幼兒班 Class (4-5 歲)		幼兒班 Class (5-6 歲)	
		學部 Stream		學部 Stream		學部 Stream		學部 Stream	
		中文/中英文 Chinese/ Anglo-Chinese	其他* Others*	中文/ 中英文 Chinese/ Anglo-Chinese	其他* Others*	中文/中英文 Chinese/ Anglo-Chinese	其他* Others*	中文/中英文 Chinese/ Anglo-Chinese	其他* Others*
上午班 AM	全年收費 Fee per annum								
	期數 No. of instalments								
下午班 PM	全年收費 Fee per annum								
	期數 No. of instalments								
全日班 Whole Day	全年收費 Fee per annum								
	期數 No. of instalments								

請以√代表你的選擇。

Please tick √ the most appropriate choice.

2. 個人資料

Personal Particulars

2.1 姓名 Name \_\_\_\_\_

2.2 性別 Sex \_\_\_\_\_

2.3 年齡 Age

- |                                       |   |                                |
|---------------------------------------|---|--------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 25 或以下 below | <input type="checkbox"/> 26-30            | <input type="checkbox"/> 31-40 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 41-50        | <input type="checkbox"/> 51 或以上 and above |                                |

2.4 在現職學校擔任幼稚園校長/幼兒中心主任的年數 No. of years as kindergarten principal/nursery supervisor in the present school  
\_\_\_\_\_

2.5 曾任職幼稚園校長/幼兒中心主任的總年資(包括現職學校) Total no. of years as kindergarten principal/nursery supervisor (including the present school) \_\_\_\_\_

2.6 曾任職幼稚園校長/幼兒中心主任的學校數目(包括現職學校) No. of schools in which you have worked as principal/supervisor (including the present school) \_\_\_\_\_

2.7 我的最高專業資歷 My highest professional qualification

- ☐ 學士學位(幼兒教育) Bachelor Degree (Early Childhood Education)
- ☐ 幼稚園教育證書/同等學歷 Certificate of Education/Higher Diploma/Advanced Diploma (Early Childhood Education)
- ☐ 合格幼稚園教師或同等學歷 QKT/CPPE/CCW
- ☐ 其他，請註明 Others, please state  
\_\_\_\_\_

2.8 我的最高專業資歷從以下大學/學院獲得 My highest professional qualification was obtained from

- ☐ 香港理工大學 Hong Kong Polytechnic University
  - ☐ 香港教育學院 Hong Kong Institute of Education
  - ☐ 香港浸會大學 Hong Kong Baptist University
  - ☐ 香港教育專業學院(李惠利分校)Hong Kong Institute of Vocational Education (Lee Wai Lee Campus)
  - ☐ 其他，請註明 Others, please state
- 

多謝你填寫本問卷，請攜同問卷出席有關之訪問。

**Thank you for taking time to fill in this questionnaire. Please bring the completed questionnaire to the interview.**

## 問卷 Fact-finding Questionnaire (for teachers)

多謝參與本研究，你的個人資料將絕對保密。

Thank you for participating in this study. Every effort will be taken to maintain confidentiality to protect each participant's anonymity.

請以√代表你的選擇。

(Please tick √ the most appropriate choice.)

1. 個人資料  
Personal Particulars

1.1 姓名 Name \_\_\_\_\_

1.2 性別 Sex \_\_\_\_\_

1.3 職位 Post \_\_\_\_\_

1.4 年齡 Age

- |                                       |   |                                |
|---------------------------------------|---|--------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 25 或以下 below | <input type="checkbox"/> 26-30            | <input type="checkbox"/> 31-40 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 41-50        | <input type="checkbox"/> 51 或以上 and above |                                |

1.5 在現職學校擔任幼稚園教師/幼兒中心工作人員的年數 No. of years as kindergarten teacher/child care worker in the present school \_\_\_\_\_

1.6 曾任職幼稚園教師/幼兒中心工作人員的總年資(包括現職學校) Total no. of years as kindergarten teacher/child care worker (including the present school) \_\_\_\_\_

1.7 曾任職幼稚園教師/幼兒中心工作人員的學校數目(包括現職學校) No. of schools in which you have worked as kindergarten teacher/child care worker (including the present school) \_\_\_\_\_

1.8 我的最高專業資歷 My highest professional qualification

- ☐ 學士學位(幼兒教育) Bachelor Degree (Early Childhood Education)
- ☐ 幼稚園教育證書/同等學歷 Certificate of Education/Higher Diploma/Advanced Diploma (Early Childhood Education)
- ☐ 合格幼稚園教師或同等學歷 QKT/CPPE/CCW
- ☐ 其他，請註明 Others, please state \_\_\_\_\_

1.9 我的最高專業資歷從以下大學/學院獲得 My highest professional qualification was obtained from

- ☐ 香港理工大學 Hong Kong Polytechnic University
  - ☐ 香港教育學院 Hong Kong Institute of Education
  - ☐ 香港浸會大學 Hong Kong Baptist University
  - ☐ 香港教育專業學院(李惠利分校)Hong Kong Institute of Vocational Education (Lee Wai Lee Campus)
  - ☐ 其他，請註明 Others, please state
- 

多謝你填寫本問卷，請攜同問卷出席有關之訪問。

**Thank you for taking time to fill in this questionnaire. Please bring the completed questionnaire to the interview.**

## 問卷 Fact-finding Questionnaire (for support staff)

多謝參與本研究，你的個人資料將絕對保密。

Thank you for accepting the invitation for participating in this study. Every effort will be taken to maintain confidentiality to protect each participant's anonymity.

請以√代表你的選擇。

(Please tick √ the most appropriate choice.)

## 1. 個人資料

Personal Particulars

1.1 姓名 Name \_\_\_\_\_

1.2 性別 Sex \_\_\_\_\_

1.3 職位 Post \_\_\_\_\_

1.4 年齡 Age

- ☐ 25 或以下 below      ☐ 26-30      ☐ 31-40  
☐ 41-50      ☐ 51 或以上 and above

1.5 在本校任職的總共年數 Total no. of years working for the present school \_\_\_\_\_

1.6 我的最高學歷 My highest educational level

- ☐ 研究院程度 Postgraduate Level  
☐ 大專/大學程度 Tertiary/University Level  
☐ 中學程度 Secondary Level  
☐ 小學程度 Primary Level  
☐ 其他，請註明 Others, please state
- 

多謝你填寫本問卷，請攜同問卷出席關之訪問。

Thank you for taking time to fill in this questionnaire and consent form.  
Please bring the completed questionnaire and form to the interview.

## 問卷 Fact-finding Questionnaire (for parents)

多謝參與本研究，你的個人資料將絕對保密。

Thank you for participating in this study. Every effort will be taken to maintain confidentiality to protect each participant's anonymity.

請以√代表你的選擇。

(Please tick √ the most appropriate choice.)

## 1. 個人資料

Personal Particulars

1.1 姓名 Name \_\_\_\_\_ 1.2 性別 Sex \_\_\_\_\_

1.3 職業 Occupation \_\_\_\_\_

1.4 年齡 Age

☐ 30 以下 below 30      ☐ 30-39      ☐ 40-49  
☐ 50-59      ☐ 60 and above 以上

1.5 家庭成員總數(包括你本人) Total no. of Family Members (including yourself) \_\_\_\_\_

1.6 曾就讀和在本校就讀的子女總數 Total no. of your children have attended and those are attending the present school \_\_\_\_\_

1.7 家庭每月總收入(港幣) Total Family Income (HK\$) per month

☐ 5,000 以下 below      ☐ 5,001-10,000      ☐ 10,001-15,000  
☐ 15,001-20,000      ☐ 20,001-30,000      ☐ 30,001-40,000  
☐ 40,001 or above 以上



1.8 我的最高學歷 My highest educational level

- ☐ 研究院程度 Postgraduate Level
  - ☐ 大專/大學程度 Tertiary Level
  - ☐ 中學程度 Secondary Level
  - ☐ 小學程度 Primary Level
  - ☐ 其他，請註明 Others, please state
- 

多謝你填寫本問卷，請攜同問卷出席關之訪問。

**Thank you for taking time to fill in this questionnaire and consent form.  
Please bring the completed questionnaire and form to the interview.**

訪問內容 Interview Guide (for preschool governors)

請於訪問前，抽空閱讀以下問題，多謝你的寶貴時間與合作。

**It would be greatly appreciated if you could spend some time to read through the following questions before the interview.**

1. 你認為一個優質的幼兒教育課程具備那些重要特點？  
In your opinion, what are the important features of a good quality early childhood programme?
2. 你認為那些因素會影響課程的質素？  
What factors do you think contribute to / affect the programme quality?
3. 你認為那些因素影響貴校的課程質素？  
Are those factors you have just mentioned contributing to / affecting the programme quality in your school?
4. 你認為學校如何提昇學校的課程質素？  
In your view, what has your school done to promote programme quality?
5. 回想近期發生的一或兩件事情，是你知道或有參與，與課程質素的改進有關的，請描述。  
Please describe one or two recent changes that you are familiar with or have taken part in which have been introduced to improve programme quality.

*(備註：請就問題 5 的內容，回答問題 6, 7, 8 及 9。)*

*(Remark: Please answer questions No. 6, 7, 8 and 9 based on the changes you describe in question No. 5.)*

6. 誰人擔任領導的角色去帶領和管理那些改進的工作？  
Who has played a leading role in managing and leading the changes?
7. 如果你有參與改進質素的過程，你負責那些工作？你認為自己擔任什麼的角色和責任？  
If you have taken part in the process of improvement, what did you do?  
And what do you perceive your own role and responsibility in the process?
8. 在學校改進的過程中，你認為學校遇到那些主要的困難和障礙？又有那些助力？

What were the main difficulties and obstacles that your school principal / school faced in leading the process of school improvement? And what factors if any were helpful to your school?

9. 從質素角度來看，你認為成效是怎樣？  
What do you think about the outcomes of the changes in terms of quality?
10. 你認為校長的職務那些與管理有關？那些與領導有關？兩者有什麼相似或不同的地方？  
In your opinion which aspects of the job of your school principal relate to management/ leadership? Are there any similarities or differences?
11. 請描述你與校長的合作關係。  
Describe the working relationship between you and your school principal.
12. 請描述你與校內其他同事的合作關係。  
Describe the working relationship between you and the staff of the school.
13. 有效的領導是怎樣的？  
What are the characteristics of effective leadership?
14. 請你用一個比喻來形容什麼是有效的領導。  
Could you use a metaphor to describe what effective leadership is.

訪問內容 Interview Guide (for preschool principals)

請於訪問前，抽空閱讀以下問題，多謝你的寶貴時間與合作。

**It would be greatly appreciated if you could spend some time to read through the following questions before the interview.**

1. 你認為一個優質的幼兒教育課程具備那些重要特點？  
In your opinion, what are the important features of a good quality early childhood programme?
2. 你認為那些因素會影響課程的質素？  
What factors do you think contribute to / affect the programme quality?
3. 你認為那些因素影響貴校的課程質素？  
Are those factors you have just mentioned contributing to / affecting the programme quality in your school?
4. 你運用什麼策略來提昇學校的課程質素？  
What do you do to promote the programme quality?
5. 回想近期發生的一或兩件事情，是與課程質素改進有關的，請描述。  
Please describe one or two recent changes for the improvement of programme quality.  
  
(備註：請就問題 5 的內容，回答問題 6, 7, 8 及 9。)  
(Remark: Please answer question No. 6, 7, 8 and 9 based on the changes you describe in question No. 5.)
6. 你如何管理和領導那些改進的工作？  
What did you do to manage and lead the changes?
7. 你認為在過程中，你擔任什麼的角色或責任？  
How do you perceive your own role and responsibility in the process?
8. 在學校改進的過程中，你遇到那些主要的困難和障礙？又有那些有利條件？  
What were the main difficulties and obstacles that you faced in leading the process of school improvement? And what factors if any were helpful to you?

9. 從質素的角度來看，你認為成效是怎樣？  
What do you think about the outcomes of the changes in terms of quality?
10. 你的職務那些與管理有關？那些與領導有關？兩者有什麼相似或不同的地方？  
Which aspects of your job relate to management / leadership? Are there any similarities or differences?
11. 請描述你與校監、教師、支援人員和家長的合作關係。  
Describe the working relationship between you, your school governor, teachers, support staff and parents.
12. 有效的領導是怎樣的？  
What are the characteristics of effective leadership?
13. 請你用一個比喻來形容什麼是有效的領導。  
Could you use a metaphor to describe what effective leadership is.

訪問內容 Interview Guide (for preschool teachers)

請於訪問前，抽空閱讀以下問題，多謝你的寶貴時間與合作。

**It would be greatly appreciated if you could spend some time to read through the following questions before the interview.**

1. 你認為二/三至六歲的幼兒有那些發展上的需要？  
In your opinion, what are the developmental needs of young children between 2/3 to 6 years old?
2. 你認為怎樣的課程才能配合和幫助幼兒全面發展？  
What makes a programme that could benefit the development of young children?
3. 你認為貴校的課程怎樣配合幼兒的需要？  
How do your programmes meet the needs of the children in your school?
4. 你認為學校如何提昇學校的課程質素？  
In your opinion, what has your school done to promote programme quality?
5. 回想近期發生的一或兩件事情，是你知道或有參與，與課程質素的改進有關的，請描述。  
Please describe one or two recent changes that you know about / have taken part in for the improvement of programme quality.  
  
(備註：請就問題 5 的內容，回答問題 6, 7, 8 及 9。)  
(Remark: Please answer question No. 6, 7, 8 and 9 based on the changes you describe in question No. 5.)
6. 誰人擔任領導的角色去帶領和管理那些改進的工作？  
Who has played a leading role to manage and lead the changes?
7. 如果你有參與改進質素的過程，你負責那些工作？你認為自己擔任什麼的角色和責任？  
If you have taken part in the process of improvement, what did you do?  
And how do you perceive your own role and responsibility in the process?
8. 在學校改進的過程中，你認為學校遇到那些主要的困難和障礙？又有那些有利條件？

What were the main difficulties and obstacles that your school faced in leading the process of school improvement? And what factors if any were helpful to your school principal / school?

9. 從教與學和管理質素角度來看，你認為成效是怎樣？  
What do you think about the outcomes of the changes in terms of quality?
10. 你認為校長的職務那些與管理有關？那些與領導有關？兩者有什麼相似或不同的地方？  
Which aspects of the job of your school principal relate to management / leadership? Are there any similarities or differences?
11. 請描述你與校長的合作關係。  
Describe the working relationship between you and your school principal.
12. 請描述你與其他同事的合作關係。  
Describe the working relationship between you and your colleagues.
13. 有效的領導是怎樣的？  
What are the characteristics of effective leadership?
14. 請你用一個比喻來形容什麼是有效的領導。  
Could you use a metaphor to describe what effective leadership is.

訪問內容 Interview Guide (for support staff)

請於訪問前，抽空閱讀以下問題，多謝你的寶貴時間與合作。

**It would be greatly appreciated if you could spend some time to read through the following questions before the interview.**

1. 根據你的經驗，二/三至六歲的幼兒有那些需要？  
In your experience, what are the needs of young children between 2/3 to 6 years old?
2. 你認為貴校如何照顧幼兒的需要？  
What does your school do to meet the needs of the children?
3. 你認為什麼因素可以令貴校課程能照顧幼兒的需要？  
What makes the programmes offered by your school meet the needs of the children?
4. 回想近期發生的一或兩件事情，是你知道或有參與，與課程質素的改進有關的，請描述。  
Please describe one or two recent changes that you know about / have taken part in for the improvement of programme quality.  
  
(備註：請就問題 4 的內容，回答問題 5, 6, 7 及 8。)  
(Remark: Please answer question No. 5, 6, 7 and 8 based on the changes you describe in question No. 4.)
5. 誰人擔任領導的角色去帶領和管理那些改進的工作？  
Who has played a leading role to manage and lead the changes?
6. 如果你有參與改進質素的過程，你負責那些工作？你認為自己擔任什麼的角色和責任？  
If you have taken part in the process of improvement, what did you do?  
And how do you perceive your own role and responsibility in the process?
7. 在學校改進的過程中，你認為學校遇到那些主要的困難和障礙？又有那些有利條件？  
What were the main difficulties and obstacles that your school faced in leading the process of school improvement? And what factors if any were helpful to your school?
8. 從質素角度來看，你認為成效是怎樣？



What do you think about the outcomes of the changes in terms of quality?

9. 你認為校長的職務那些與管理有關? 那些與領導有關? 兩者有什麼相似或不同的地方?  
Which aspects of the job of your school principal relate to management / leadership? Are there any similarities or differences?
10. 請描述你與校長的合作關係。  
Describe the working relationship between you and your school principal.
11. 請描述你與其他同事的合作關係。  
Describe the working relationship between you and your colleagues.
12. 有效的領導是怎樣的?  
What are the characteristics of effective leadership?
13. 請你用一個比喻來形容什麼是有效的領導。  
Could you use a metaphor to describe what effective leadership is.

訪問內容 Interview Guide (for parents)

請於訪問前，抽空閱讀以下問題，多謝你的寶貴時間與合作。

**It would be greatly appreciated if you could spend some time to read through the following questions before the interview.**

1. 請描述一下你的小朋友所就讀班級的課程。  
Please describe the programme that your child is now enrolled in.
2. 你認為學校的課程能否配合和幫助你的小朋友全面發展？  
Do you think the programme could meet the developmental needs of your child?
3. 你認為什麼因素可以令學校課程能照顧小朋友的需要？  
What makes the programme offered by the school meet the needs of the children?
4. 你認為學校如何提昇學校的課程質素？  
In your opinion, what has your school done to promote the programme quality?
5. 回想近期發生的一或兩件事情，是你知道或有參與，與課程質素的改進有的，請描述。  
Please describe one or two recent changes that you know about / have taken part in for the improvement of programme quality.  
  
(備註：請就問題 5 的內容，回答問題 6, 7, 8 及 9。)  
(Remark: Please answer question No. 6, 7, 8 and 9 based on the changes you describe in question No. 5.)
6. 誰人擔任領導的角色去帶領和管理那些改進的工作？  
Who has played a leading role to manage and lead the changes?
7. 如果你有參與改進質素的過程，你負責那些工作？你認為自己擔任什麼的角色和責任？  
If you have taken part in the process of improvement, what did you do?  
And how do you perceive your own role and responsibility in the process?
8. 在學校改進的過程中，你認為學校遇到那些主要的困難和障礙？又有那些有利條件？

What were the main difficulties and obstacles that your school faced in leading the process of school improvement? And what factors if any were helpful to your school principal / school?

9. 從質素角度來看，你認為成效是怎樣？  
What do you think about the outcomes of the changes in terms of quality?
10. 你認為校長的職務那些與管理有關？那些與領導有關？兩者有什麼相似或不同的地方？  
Which aspects of the job of your school principal relate to management / leadership? Are there any similarities or differences?
11. 請描述你與校長的合作關係。  
Describe the working relationship between you and your school principal.
12. 請描述你與校內其他同事的合作關係。  
Describe the working relationship between you and the staff of the school.
13. 有效的領導是怎樣的？  
What are the characteristics of effective leadership?
14. 請你用一個比喻來形容什麼是有效的領導。  
Could you use a metaphor to describe what effective leadership is.

**TeacherXX**  
**Summary Report**

**Age Range: XX**

**Professional Background:**

TeacherXX started working as a non-trained teacher in XX (year). After working for XX years, she attended the basic training course in XX (training institution). She was awarded the certificate qualification in XX (year) and was receiving the advanced training at higher diploma level at the time of this study.

**Job History:**

After working in one of the schools of XX (organization) for several years, TeacherXX was internally transferred to the case study school in XX (year). She has been working in the school for XX years.

**Job Responsibility in School:**

TeacherXX was the class teacher of the XX-year-olds and was also the member of XX functional group. The functional group was responsible for developing the centralized curriculum framework on the area of XX learning for all the schools of the organization. Being a member of the group, TeacherXX represented the case study school by attending the monthly meetings for representatives of the sibling schools on curriculum design and planning. She said Organization XX organized school visits and workshops for them in order to facilitate the professional exchange among the members of the functional group. She also said that the experience of collaborating with the sibling schools enriched her professional knowledge and skills, and that this made her a more effective curriculum co-ordinator in the case study school. Internally, she worked closely with her colleagues on designing the XX learning activities for the children in the school.

Although there was no administrative or clerical staff in the case study school, it created a functional post called “on-duty” teacher (值班老師). Teachers had to take turns each year to be “on-duty”. The role and responsibility of “on-duty” teacher was to give support to the school principal in administrative work and to provide assistance to the class teachers when necessary. In addition, the “on-duty” teacher was the relief for teachers who were on leave or absent for outside training. TeacherXX said she was assigned to be the “on-duty” teacher a few years ago. She said it was a good opportunity for her to observe and to learn the teaching practices of her colleagues.

### **Views on Early Childhood Education:**

TeacherXX said the parents became more demanding and expected more from the school in recent years. Teachers had to “take very good care” (特別小心) of the young children. They communicated frequently with the parents to report on what happened to their children in the school.

TeacherXX mentioned that in the past, children had to stay in their own classroom and to be taught by their class teacher. She thought the learning was not so in-depth. After adopting the new approach, children became more active in learning. They could move freely in different classrooms and worked with different teachers. TeacherXX said that this could enhance and enrich the learning experiences of young children. At the same time, teachers needed to make more effort in planning and communicating with each other. She thought that the new approach could provide an opportunity for them to exchange ideas and to understand the work of each other very well.

### **Views on Management and Leadership of the Case Study School:**

As mentioned earlier, the case study school had adopted a new approach in curriculum and pedagogy a few years ago. TeacherXX said that the school governor and principal spent a lot of time in introducing and explaining to the teachers the rationale and objectives of the new approach. The school principal collected opinions from the teachers on how to implement the changes in classrooms. TeacherXX said that the teachers did not know much about the concepts of the new approach. Therefore, the new programme was run unsmoothly at the very beginning. In view of that, the school principal gathered the information and organized some sharing sessions for them. The situation was much better now.

When implementing the curriculum change, Organization XX gave support to the teachers by inviting two consultants to provide advice on the direction of the new development. Organization XX also employed outside experts to give on-site training to the teachers. TeacherXX said that it was helpful because she and her colleagues could learn the subject knowledge and skills on implementing the XX activities. As mentioned previously, monthly meetings and school visits were organized to facilitate the collaboration among the sibling schools. TeacherXX thought it could enhance her professional competence. Meanwhile, the school principal could give them practical advice and organized the internal meetings for facilitating the teamwork in the school.

TeacherXX thought that the school principal faced a number of challenges in leading the curriculum change. The school principal had to be open to different opinions and led the teachers to achieve the common goals. The school principal tried her best to maintain effective communication among all staff members and to make the teachers aware of the importance of teamwork in the process of change.

TeacherXX said that the school principal knew each member of staff very well. The school principal could effectively allocate duties based on the ability and interest of individual staff. Usually, the school principal consulted them on job assignment every year. She respected their opinions and would not push them to take up the duties if they did not want to do so.

TeacherXX said that the school principal was willing to give support and to share her experience with the teachers when needed. The school principal could also give good advice on front-line practice, such as classroom setup, lesson planning and teaching skills.

TeacherXX said that the parents were doubtful about the learning effectiveness of the new approach in the initial stage. Teachers had to explain the rationale and to provide substantial evidence on learning as a proof to the parents. Gradually, the parents became more accepting of the new change. TeacherXX also said the parents were supportive. They were willing to provide help to teachers in the school activities, such as graduation ceremony and excursions.

TeacherXX said that the school management was open to parents. The school tried best to answer parents' enquiries and made rapid responses to their suggestions and needs.

### **Conceptions on Effective Leadership:**

A good leader should have his/her own vision and mission. He/she should be clear about the direction and objectives to be achieved and be open to different opinions. A good leader could foresee the potential problems and difficulties in the process of change and actively gave support to his/her subordinates whenever necessary. A good leader gave emotional support to his/her subordinates and should be lenient and helpful. A good leader could help his/her subordinates learn from mistakes and could give incentives for further improvement.

### **Metaphor used:**

TeacherXX used a troop leader of Girl Guides as a metaphor to describe effective leadership. She said that a troop leader could train his/her team members to perform well in marching. Meanwhile, the team members should have the potential and should make efforts on practicing the skills. Otherwise, the marching could not be performed well if it was solely dependent on the individual efforts of the troop leader. The same was true for the effective leadership in school. TeacherXX said the teamwork was important for school success.

### **Reflections:**

I found that TeacherXX was quite energetic and willing to share her experience. She appreciated that the experienced teachers gave her support when she was new

to the profession. This was because she did not receive any training before entering the field.

It seemed that TeacherXX enjoyed talking about the experience of being a member of the functional group. She said she could gain professional growth in the process and could obtain the invaluable experience of coordinating her colleagues in implementing the new learning activities. It was evident that she was aware of her leading role in the process of school improvement.

It seemed that TeacherXX valued the leadership of the school principal, particularly in the areas of leading the new curriculum change and personnel management. For the former, TeacherXX said the school principal could manage the change effectively and the quality of learning was improved. In respect of the latter, TeacherXX said that the school principal could make appropriate and fair job assignments for them. That meant that all members of staff not only knew his/her own duty and responsibility but also gained a better understanding of the work of others.

Table of Category

1	Allocation of duties	School A	School B
	School Stakeholders	Issues discussed	Issues discussed
	School Governor	Using the ability and preferences of individual staff Job satisfaction	
	School Principal	Using the ability and preferences of individual staff Job satisfaction A sense of respect Job rotation for capacity building	Using the ability of individual staff Building confidence Job assignment for capacity building Maintaining equal workload among members of staff
	Teachers	Using the ability and preferences of individual staff Using the observation of the school principal, with the consent of the staff concerned Using the expertise of individual staff gained from professional training Job rotation for capacity building	Using the ability of individual staff Using the school principal's discussions with senior teachers Maintaining equal workload among staff
	Members of Support Staff	Job rotation for equal workload Clear communication with staff	Clear job descriptions Maintaining equal workload among staff
	Parents	Using parents' background and ability	Using parents' background and ability



Table of Metaphors

<b>School A</b>			
School Stakeholder	Metaphor used	Informant's Elaboration	Abstractions
School Governor A	Captain of a ship	A good leader knows the direction and has the skills of "steering control". He/she could direct the ship to the destination. When there is a crisis in school, a good leader knows how to provide practical solutions, rather than just giving some rhetorical advice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- providing clear direction</li> <li>- giving practical advice</li> </ul>
School Principal A	Shepherd	A good leader is like a shepherd and his/her subordinates are the "sheep". A good shepherd is able to provide the best grass to feed the sheep. But sometimes, the shepherd has to "scold" those who do not "perform" well.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- caring attitudes to staff</li> <li>- maintaining staff discipline when necessary</li> </ul>
Teacher A	Mother	A good mother should plan for her baby's future. Similarly, a good leader should have a blueprint for the future of the school. He/she is a considerate person who gives love and care and trusts his/her subordinates. The leader does not focus only on the outcomes but also cares about the emotional needs of his/her subordinates in the process of management.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- providing future planning</li> <li>- caring attitudes to staff</li> </ul>
Teacher B	Dragon boat race	A good leader is the captain of a dragon boat who directs the team members by giving drum beat signals. All staff including the classroom teachers and housekeepers are the team members. Everyone had to listen to the drum beat and pedal at the same speed. The boat can move fast only through the joint efforts of the captain and all the team members.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- providing clear guidance</li> <li>- maintaining good teamwork</li> </ul>
Teacher C	Troop leader of Girl Guides	A troop leader of Girl Guides is used as a metaphor to describe effective leadership. A good troop leader can train his/her subordinates to perform well in marching. Meanwhile, the subordinates had to make an effort to practice the skills. They also should have the potential and be willing to improve themselves. Otherwise, the school would not be successful if all members of staff were dependent on the school principal.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- providing support in teaching practice and improving professional competence</li> <li>- leading role of subordinates</li> </ul>
Teacher D	Rubber band	Rubber bend was used to describe effective leadership. A good leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- managing and leading with flexibility</li> </ul>

		knows how to give flexibility to his/her subordinates in the process of leading. Just like using a rubber band holding a pile of paper, a good leader can exercise leadership too rigidly or too loosely. He/she knows how to make a good balance in managing people. Meanwhile, the subordinates needed to do it reciprocally. Both the leader and subordinates should give space to each other.	
Teacher E	Blowing up a balloon	A balloon was used to represent the capacity of children's ability. When blowing the air into the balloon (i.e. designing the curriculum), a good leader needs to understand the levels of development of the children. The curriculum should be appropriate for the children's needs and interests. Otherwise, the balloon will burst.	- providing instructional leadership
Staff A	Train	A train is composed of a number of compartments. A leader functions as the first carriage who leads the direction. His/her subordinates are the compartments. They can run smoothly on the railway without losing track only by following the direction of the first carriage.	- proving clear direction and leading the team
Staff B	Nil	*When I asked Staff B to use a metaphor to describe effective leadership, she could hardly think of any. I switched off the recorder for a while, but she still could not give an answer. Probably, it was difficult for her to think at an abstract level.	
Parent A1	Nil		
Parent A2	Queen Bee	A good leader is like a queen bee and she has a lot of male bees to work hard for the baby bees. A good leader is the coordinator of the teamwork.	- maintaining good teamwork
Parent A3	Cosy Home	A good leader looks like a cosy home. It does not have a luxurious outlook but the interior design is very good and comfortable. Some people are not willing to go inside the house to take a look because of the ordinary outlook. But the parent thought those people were missing out something good.	- being practical and down-to-earth
Parent A4	Big Tree	A big tree has a strong root to support the trunk. Organization A is the root of Case school A. The school principal is the tree trunk, the teachers are the branches and the children are the leaves. The tree trunk can provide support to the branches and then the branches can grow to provide nutrition	- providing support to staff

		to the leaves.	
Parent A5	Octopus	A good leader looks like an octopus who attracted parent and young children. The leader is very hardworking and willing to try new things. An octopus has a lot of legs (i.e. subordinates) which can work together for the common goal. The legs have to cooperate to each others. The leader is the head of the octopus.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- having the charismas</li> <li>- maintaining good teamwork</li> </ul>
Parent B1	Rowing a boat	A good leader is the captain of a boat. Everyone on board has to work together and the leader provides the direction. Then, the leader and subordinates can row the boat together happily.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- providing clear direction</li> <li>- maintaining good teamwork</li> </ul>
Parent B2	Second Parent	A good leader functions as the "second parent" of his children, on whom he can rely and trust. The school principal can take very good care of his children.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- being trustful and caring for children</li> </ul>
Parent B3	Captain	A good leader is a captain who knows how to maximize the use of resources. For example, The school principal can make use of the resources of the Urban Council to lend toys and books for the children whose parents cannot afford to buy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- management of resources</li> </ul>

Table of Metaphors

<b>School B</b>			
School Stakeholder	Metaphor used	Informant's Elaboration	Abstractions
School Governor B	Cat	Cats make people happy. But, when "working" at night, cats think of different methods to catch rats. It is rare for cats and rats "to play" together.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- good relationship with staff</li> <li>- maintaining staff discipline</li> </ul>
School Principal B	Romance	A leader and his/her subordinates are like two lovers. Both parties need to show how much they care for each other. The two-way communication is the key to maintaining the romantic relationship.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-caring attitude to staff</li> <li>- maintaining effective communication</li> <li>- good relationship with staff</li> </ul>
Teacher F	Seed of a Plant	A good leader is like a seed which was buried under the soil. He/she should not be selfish and should show mercy to his/her subordinates. Then, the seed could grow up to be a plant and to blossom.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- being unselfish</li> <li>- caring attitude to staff</li> </ul>
Teacher G	Ship Captain	A captain has the skills of navigating the ship to the destination (i.e. school mission). At the same time, he or she has to serve every passenger (i.e. children and their parents) on board. The leader is able to make appropriate and fair job assignments so that his/her staff can work together as a team. In return, staff should trust their leader. Otherwise, it will not work out well. A leader can gain trust from their subordinates by giving them enough support and encouragement and being kind to them.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- achieving the set goal</li> <li>- allocating duties properly</li> <li>- maintaining good teamwork</li> <li>- caring attitudes to staff</li> </ul>
Teacher H	Roof of a House	A good leader functions as the roof of a house. His/her subordinates act like the walls to support the roof. The leader can provide shelter to his/her subordinates from the heavy rain and wind force. Teacher H said some school principals unreasonably held teachers accountable for children's accidents if they occurred in school. A good leader should try to understand the situation and explain it to the parents.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- providing back up for teachers to face the increased demands of parents</li> </ul>
Teacher I	Compass	A good leader functions as a compass to provide direction for his/her subordinates to avoid getting lost. Especially for those work in the field	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- providing clear direction</li> <li>- giving emotional support to staff</li> </ul>

		for a long time, it is too easy for them to compromise their professional values and beliefs. The reason is that teachers are under a lot of pressure and are overwhelmed by the parents' demands. A good leader can give them appropriate support and uphold professional values and beliefs.	
Teacher J	Spike	A good leader acts like a spike to protect his/her subordinates against the thunderstorm. He/she could stand up for the subordinates and handle the reasonable complaints of the parents. The leader can give the subordinates a sense of security.	- providing back up for teachers to face the increased demands of parents
Staff C	Nil	*When I asked Staff C to use a metaphor to describe effective leadership, she could hardly think of one. I switched off the recorder for a while, but she still could not give an answer. Probably, it was difficult for her to think at an abstract level.	
Staff D	Family	A good leadership is like the parent of a family. The family members should be open to each other and share one another's ups and downs. The parent tells their children if they do something wrong. The children need to accept their parents' advice if they are wrong. When the children grows up and has their own opinions, the parents need to listen to them, too. It is important to have two-way communication.	- maintaining staff discipline - providing staff supervision - being open to different opinions
Parent C1	Nil		
Parent C2	Mother	A good leader is like a mother who makes every effort to take care of her children.	- caring attitudes to staff
Parent C3	Lion	A good leader is like a lion, the king of all animals. The leader is a very serious person, but he/she is also a reasonable person. That was why a good leader is respected by his/her subordinates.	- maintaining staff discipline reasonably
	A Child who learns drawing	A good leader is like a child who learns drawing. Every time, he/she can learn something new. A good leader should aim for continuous self-improvement.	- keeping abreast of self and professional growth
Parent C4	Nil		
Parent D1	Big family	A good leader should be a role model. He/She makes all the family members live together happily and willing to	- being the role model - being open to different opinions

		contribute for the family. A good leader is willing to listen to different opinions.	
Parent D2	Nil		
Parent D3	Nil		
Parent D4	Stream	Management is like a stream. Effective leadership can team up his/her subordinates to overcome any difficulties (such as a big rock).	- leading the team to overcome challenges
Parent D5	Multi-purpose Socket	A good leader can meet the diverse needs of different people.	- catering for the diverse needs